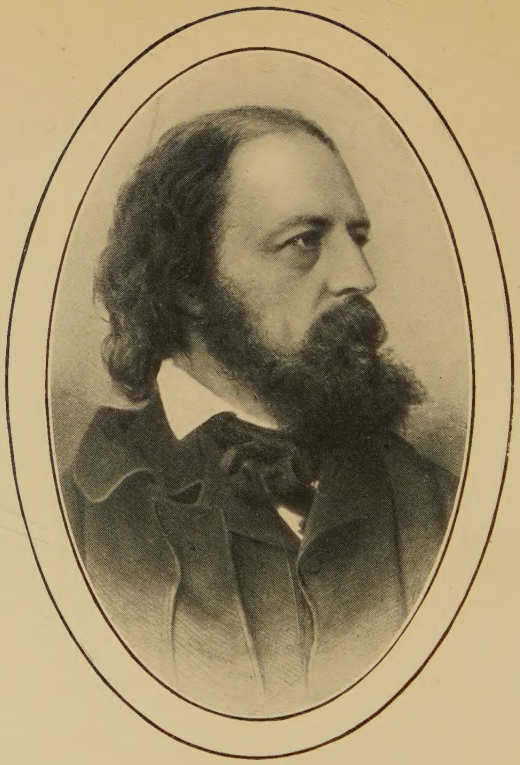

Lord Tennyson
From a photograph

Fr.

FAMOUS ENGLISH BOOKS AND THEIR STORIES

TOLD BY

AMY CRUSE

AUTHOR OF "ENGLISH LITERATURE THROUGH THE AGES" "ELIZABETHAN LYRISTS AND THEIR POETRY" "THE BOOK OF MYTHS" ETC.

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THIS book consists of suitable chapters selected from the author's *English Literature Through the Ages*. The minimum amount of adaptation necessary for the purposes of the present volume has been made, but for the most part the chapters stand as they were originally written, and fulfil the author's aim of "telling the story of English literature through the stories of individual books." The difference is that here the area is, of necessity, more circumscribed, and those who would seek to know more of the enchanting story of our great English books are recommended to read the larger volume already mentioned.

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Famous English Books and their Stories

I

BEOWULF

IN the Manuscript Room of the British Museum there is a small parchment book of one hundred and forty pages, old and worn and discoloured. It has evidently suffered from fire, for its edges are charred and broken, and there are holes in some of the leaves. It is written in the clear beautiful hand which the Irish monks introduced into England during the seventh century; its language is the West Saxon form of Old English. There is no attempt at illumination or ornament, except that the capital letters beginning a fresh division of the poem are larger and blacker than the others. In recent years the book has been carefully and skilfully bound, and the edges of each page protected with strips of parchment; for its importance as a unique and priceless literary treasure has at last been recognized. If one of the chances of its long and adventurous existence had brought it to destruction, and it had never reached its safe resting-place in the British Museum, we should have lost the most important part of the first chapter in the history of our literature. We should, besides, have lost our most valuable witness to the manner of life our ancestors led in those far-off days, to their spirit and temper, and to the aims and ideals which they set before themselves. For this is the only copy known to be in existence of the old Anglo-Saxon epic, *Beowulf*.

Beowulf stands for us as a type of the stories our ancestors loved. It tells of fierce fighting and hand-to-hand encounters, of strange and terrible beasts whose lair is in "fearsome

halls" under the sea, or in fiery caverns on the high heath. Mighty deeds of valour are done as man and monster face each other in the midnight darkness, or as the "fierce-flaming breath" of the fiery dragon "springeth far and wide." The hero of the story is young, handsome, brave, and nobly born, cool in the midst of danger, high-hearted when disaster comes, modest in victory. English literature has given us many such heroes since the time of Beowulf; he stands the first of a long line which reaches on even to our own day.

Briefly outlined, the story is this. Hrothgar, King of the Scyldings, built a great and magnificent hall which he called Heorot. In the night a monster — half man, half beast — named Grendel, entered the hall, and carried off thirty thanes. Similar attacks, constantly renewed, filled Hrothgar's kingdom with mourning. The news reached Beowulf, the Geat, who took ship, came to the land of the Scyldings, and offered his services to Hrothgar to rid him of the fiend. That night Grendel came as before, but was seized by Beowulf, who struggled with him until the monster, mortally wounded, fled away, leaving his arm and shoulder in the grip of Beowulf. Great was the rejoicing, but sorrow was renewed, when, during the following night, the mother of Grendel came to avenge her son. She carried off Hrothgar's favourite thane, Æschere. The news was told to Beowulf, who at once started to find the lair of the monster. He descended to the bottom of the sea, where he found a roofed hall, the home of Grendel's mother. Beowulf wrestled with and overcame her, cut off her head and returned with it to land. Hrothgar gave him great rewards and he went back with glory to his home.

The next adventure took place when Beowulf had succeeded to the throne of the Geats and had reigned for fifty years. Then the kingdom began to be troubled by a fire-drake, who guarded a huge treasure in a stone barrow on the heath. Beowulf sought him out in his lair, and after a fierce encounter killed him, but died himself from the poison of a wound given him by the dragon.

Interest in the *Beowulf* manuscript was first aroused

about a hundred years ago, and since that time it has been closely studied by scholars and experts. Several theories with regard to its date and origin have been put forward, and the known facts of its history have been supplemented by surmises based upon its language, its style, its story, the allusions it contains, and other internal marks. To give anything like an authoritative account of the poem is, therefore, impossible; but, by reasoning upon the conclusions which research has up to the present time established, it is possible to sketch out the lines upon which its inception and growth have probably proceeded.

The races that dwelt in Northern Europe round about the shores of the Baltic Sea seem, at some time during those ages which lie behind history, to have evolved for themselves a religion that was really a nature mythology. By means of this they accounted for the creation of the world, light and darkness, summer and winter, and all the operations of nature. It is probable that the story of Beowulf had its ultimate origin in one of the myths so formed. In those wild, marshy, sea-girt regions winter was a time of dread. Its furious storms turned the sea into a devouring monster "greedy and dark of mood"; its treacherous fogs, like "a dark death shadow," "night after night held the murky moors." But the short, bright summer came at last, drove away darkness and terror, and brought joyful relief. These facts the old Teutonic races represented in primitive and picturesque fashion. They conceived winter as a terrible monster, strong, cruel, fierce, and cunning, and kindly summer as a beneficent deity who grappled with this enemy and finally overthrew him. So a nature myth was formed, and soon distinct personalities were given to its characters. In some of the old Scandinavian records we find that the god of summer days is called Beowa, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that his name has some connexion with the name of the hero of the poem we are considering.

The myth grew, as we know myths did grow among all the early peoples. Episode after episode was added. The wild, gloomy nature of a great part of the country—the desolate fens, the coast wrapped in mirk and mist, the sea

dark and treacherous—had a stern influence upon the imagination of the men who inhabited it. They peopled the land and the sea with creatures dire and terrible—sea-wolves and fire-drakes, "many of the dragon kind breathing fire," nickers, or water-spirits, eotens—loathly giants half human and half beast. All these Beowa must conquer, and the warlike spirit of our fathers loved to dwell on the details of the struggle, the fierce hand-to-hand grapple, the hard blows given and received. Their minstrels or scops—the "smiths of song"—fashioned the story into verse and sang it to eager listeners gathered round the winter fire in the hall of some great king or chieftain.

As we approach the sixth century and records grow a little clearer, the story begins to connect itself with historic fact. Hygelac, King of the Geats, Beowulf's liege lord, has been identified with Chochilaicus mentioned in the Latin history of Gregory of Tours. Between the years 512 and 520 Gregory tells us, at the time when the advance of the Saxons in England had been for the time stopped through the exertions of the Britons under the renowned King Arthur, Chochilaicus made a raid upon the Frisian shore. His band had worked great havoc, plundering and slaying all around, and were carrying their spoil back to the ships when a force sent by the Frankish king overtook and conquered them. Chochilaicus was killed, and the spoil recovered. Reference is made to this raid several times in *Beowulf*. "Hygelac," we are told, "came faring with a fleet to the Frisian's land, when the Hetware humbled him in battle, speedily attained through greater might, that the armed warrior must bow him to his fall. He fell in the midst of his fighting bands." And again, "They slew Hygelac, son of Hrethel, when in Friesland in storm of battle, the King of the Geats, gracious lord of his people, died of the sword-drink, struck down by the war-blade."

Historical originals have also been found for several of the other characters of the poem, including Beowulf himself. Scandinavian tradition preserves the memory of a thane of Hygelac's, Bothvari Biarki, whose story bears, in some points, a marked resemblance to the story of the hero of the

poem. It seems probable, therefore, that a thane of this period became famous among his countrymen for his victorious encounters with the wild beasts that infested the land, as well as for his prowess in battle. Lays were sung in his honour, his deeds were magnified, and he became a popular hero. In process of time the resemblance between his story and the myth of Beowa brought about a fusion of the two, and the hero of this composite tale emerged with all the characteristic and attractive human qualities of the warrior and the supernatural attributes of the god added thereto.

In this new form the story again became subject to alterations and additions. At that time stories of great deeds were spread abroad over the land, and passed from one generation to another by means of the songs of the minstrels. In these songs several unconnected incidents were often united to form one story, and as the names of the various heroes died out of the memories of the people the scops freely attributed their deeds to favourite legendary characters. In this way it is possible that Beowulf has been credited with heroic actions and gallant words which really belong to forgotten worthies of his race.

At what time or by what means the story came to England we are not certain. Some scholars think that the Geats, over whom Beowulf ruled, were a Low German tribe, related to the Anglo-Saxons. In that case the minstrels of the tribe would naturally have carried their lays to our country some time during the years occupied by the Saxon conquest of Britain. Other scholars believe the Geats to have been Scandinavians or Danes, and think that it was during the Danish raids and settlements of the ninth and tenth centuries that the poem was introduced. However that may be, introduced it was, not in any written form, but by means of the lays held in the memories of the scops. In its new home it soon, we may believe, stood as high in favour as it had done in the farther North. Its wild and warlike tone suited the spirit of the conquerors, even when as the years passed by they gradually settled down to peaceable occupations, and adopted Christianity. Yet still their pulses would stir

and their hearts glow at a tale of some grim and mighty combat, where by sheer valour of heart and strength of limb the victory was gained. So *Beowulf* lived on, sung by the scops, and applauded by their hearers at feast and revel.

There may have been several versions of the poem, each differing widely from the others, for by this time many hands had been at work on it, altering and revising it according to individual taste. It is significant, however, that no allusions to any national event that took place later than the first half of the sixth century are introduced. Also, all the descriptive passages apply to the scenery and natural features of the countries bordering the Baltic Sea. The site of Hrothgar's great hall, Heorot, is almost certainly the little village of Leire on the island of Zealand. It is evident, therefore, that the story underwent no fundamental alteration after it came to England.

The chief changes that this period witnessed were due to the religion of the country. The poem, as we have it now, shows a very curious mixture of pagan and Christian elements. The general tone is undoubtedly pagan and there are allusions to pagan beliefs and pagan ceremonies. But throughout the poem are scattered lines and passages, many of them of great beauty, which are distinctly Christian in character. "The Almighty," sang the scop in the hall of Heorot, "framed the world, the plain bright in beauty which the waters encircle, and, glorying in his handiwork, set the sun and moon to lighten the earth-dwellers, and decked the corners of the earth with boughs and leaves, and gave life to every kind of creature that walks alive." Nothing could be more opposed to the pagan conception of the creation of the world than this passage. The introduction of such sentiments was a natural result of the lay being sung by minstrels who were, nominally, at least, Christians. Their knowledge of the doctrines of their religion was probably of the most elementary kind, and the mixture of pagan and Christian sentiments, which strikes modern readers as incongruous, did not appear strange to them. How far their work extended we do not know, but it seems

probable that to these singers of the lay some, at least, of the Christian interpolations are due.

At last the time came when the poem was written down. In the tenth century (so much the language of the manuscript indicates) a copyist, who was probably a monk, undertook the work.

The North of England was at this period the great home of learning, and it is believed that the first copy of *Beowulf* was made in a Northumbrian monastery. Who the copyist was that did this great service to his country, and under whose orders he worked, we do not know. Whether he found the poem ready to his hand, or whether he brought together several separate lays and combined them into the *Beowulf* as we have it now can only be a matter of conjecture. Perhaps he was attracted to the story by some fighting instinct in himself, either inherited or surviving from a warlike youth before he left the turbulence of the world for the quiet of the cloister; perhaps he felt something of the old joy of battle revive as he wrote down the minstrel's words. But he would realize that as a follower of the White Christ he must try to conquer this feeling, and it may be that, partly as a result of this consciousness, he tried to give to the old pagan epic some transforming touches which should cause it to redound to the honour and glory of God.

Many copies of the original manuscript were probably made, and in this new form *Beowulf* again went on its way through the country. All the copies have perished or remain still hidden, saving only that which is now treasured in the British Museum. A close examination of the text of this has led scholars to the belief that the poem was first written in the Northern or Midland dialect, and then copied out in West Saxon, the dialect of the South.

To a monastery in the South of England, therefore, this manuscript probably belonged. It would appear that at some time or other it was subjected to revision, for there are interpolations and alterations to be distinguished, obviously written in a different ink from that used in the original work. But for long years it probably lay unnoticed on a shelf in the monastery library along with many other manuscripts which

the diligence of the copyists belonging to the establishment had produced. After the Norman Conquest there was little demand for poems of the character of *Beowulf*. The minstrels sang softer ditties, of which the main theme was love, and when warfare was described it was the warfare of chivalry, not of the rough Teutons. For a time the glory of the older literature was eclipsed.

During the five centuries that followed the Conquest the Church passed through times of danger and times of triumph, and each monastery had its chequered history. But the manuscript of the Saxon monk seems to have remained on some remote shelf, undisturbed. At last, in the sixteenth century, came the dissolution of the monasteries, and the scattering of their treasures. Many manuscripts were lost, many were destroyed or defaced. Many, we know, from discoveries made since, were used in the binding of new books. Some were employed for purposes still more ignoble. Men used them, Bishop Bale tells us, " some to scour their candlesticks, and some to rub their boots. Some they sold to the grocers and soap-sellers, and some over sea to the bookbinders, not in small number, but at times whole ships full, to the wondering of the foreign nations."

Some, however, were recovered by the efforts of munificent friends of learning who knew the value of the treasure that had been so roughly treated. Among these was Sir Robert Bruce Cotton (born 1571). He made a diligent search for the scattered manuscripts, hunting them out from the most unlikely hiding-places, and he managed to recover a large number, which included the copy of *Beowulf*. These formed the foundation of the famous library since known by his name. His son and grandson made large additions to the library, and it was handed over to the State for public use in 1702. In 1730 the books were removed to Ashburnham House, Westminster. Here, in the following year, a fire broke out, which seriously damaged many invaluable manuscripts. Among them was the *Beowulf* manuscript. Fortunately, however, parchment resists very strongly the action of fire. A few holes were burnt in the latter pages of the book, but the chief damage consisted in the charring of the edges of the

leaves, which rendered them so brittle that a considerable part has since crumbled away, carrying with it letters and even words of the poem. For a time the manuscripts were sheltered in the old dormitory at Westminster, but in 1753 they were transferred to the British Museum. Here the value of the *Beowulf* manuscript was discovered by the scholars who had access to it, and on their representations the authorities took steps to arrest the process of destruction set up by the fire. It is now treasured with the care that befits its value as the only known copy of the first English epic.

II

THE VISION OF PIERS PLOWMAN

PIERS PLOWMAN is the work of an unknown author. In this case, however, tradition and a few chance references in the literature of the time supplement the inferences gathered from the poem itself. Moreover, in the poem the writer makes several distinct allusions to his own circumstances. Carefully putting together all this evidence, we can make our story of the book.

The name of the poet was William Langland. His parents were of lowly birth and position—they may even have been serfs. They lived in the little village of Cleobury Mortimer among the Malvern Hills, probably on land belonging to Malvern Priory, which stood in the valley under the Great Hill. Will, their son, born about 1332, was a clever lad, but strange, so the neighbours thought. He was shy and quiet and dreamy in his ways, and had little to do with the sports and frolics of the village boys. The monks at the Priory school found him so apt a pupil that they talked proudly of his attainments to visitors who came to the convent; and so there were friends ready to help the clever boy and lift him from the lowly place his birth had given him. But Will was preparing himself for a future which held little chance of worldly prosperity. He was by nature a dreamer, and even in those early years, when he wandered over the fair hillsides of Malvern, his brain was haunted with visions and perplexed with doubts. Real life as he knew it among the "poor folk in cots" with whom he lived day by day was hard and cruel enough, and the lad was vaguely puzzled to know why this should be so.

> Burdened with children and chief lords' rent,
> What they spare from their spinning they spend it in house hire;
> Both in milk and in meal to make a mess o' porridge,
> To satisfy therewith the children that cry out for food.

Also themselves suffer much hunger
And woe in winter-time with waking of nights
To rise 'twixt the bed and the wall and rock the cradle;
Both to card and to comb, to patch and to wash,
To tub and to reel, rushes to peel;
That pity 'tis to read or to show in rhyme
The woe of these women that dwell in cots.

There were lords and ladies, he knew, whose lives were far different; they had ease and luxury, and good things. Why should the poor man " swynke and sweat and sow for both "? Somewhere truth and righteousness must exist, he knew it by the vague though glowing visions which flashed across his brain. But where could a man find them? How could he, Will Langland, search them out?

So, while he was yet a lad he brooded on the inequalities of life, and his sympathy with the poor folk of the land was kindled. When he climbed to the top of the Great Hill, and looked down on the grassy plain beneath him, where the shining Severn ran, and the bordering hills, covered with gorse and heather and fern, stretched away until they were lost in a blue haze, it was not the beauty of the scene that filled his mind. For him that " faire felde " was an image of the world. It was " ful of folke."

Of all manner of men, the mean and the rich,
Working and wandering as the world asketh,
Some put them to the plough, full seldom they play,
In setting and in sowing labour too hard
And win that which wasters with gluttony destroy.

As he brooded, bit by bit, the vision extended itself, until it grew into a kind of symbolic picture of the life of the time. Again and again he came back to it, and each time his imagination added further details. Soon he began to shape his thoughts into a regular poem, and to write down the verses as he made them. All his experiences were put into it. He told how the poor folk lived, and what they ate, how they talked to each other, and how bravely they bore the hardships of their lot. He told also how the spirit of discontent was growing among them, how they were beginning to realize the oppression from which they suffered, and the

corruption of the rulers they were bound to obey. All the vague political talk which was going about from one poor cot to another, and which, thirty years later, was to bring the great rising of the peasants, he hardly understood. He had many a time heard hard-handed labouring men talk of the king and nobles, and of what might be expected from them; of the Church and how it had fallen away from Truth; and ever more and more clearly he saw that if the lot of the poor man was to be improved it was from himself and his own efforts that the improvement must come. The man who worked was the true hero, for he lived according to truth and righteousness. Therefore Langland made a poor ploughman the hero of his tale.

So the vision shaped itself in the mind of the dreaming boy. He saw Flattery, Falsehood, and Guile, in the guise of the rich and noble, ranging with the crowd; and, worst of all, he saw Lady Meed, drawing to herself a large company of followers:

> A Woman wedded, wicked,
> Hire araye me avoided, such richesse saw I never.

These ruled the world, though Conscience did her best to bring their evil plans to naught. Then Reason preached to the people, bidding them forsake their sins, and turn and ask God's mercy. Truth should deliver them. All were willing to seek for Truth, but where was he to be found? In that great company there seemed to be none who knew him. Many saints they knew to whose shrines they had made pilgrimages, but none of these was named Truth. Then a ploughman, who was called Piers, stepped forward. He could guide them, he said, to Truth.

> I knowe him as kindly as clerk doth his sautre.
> I have been his tiller to tene his wastes.

He promised to take them on their way when he had finished ploughing his half-acre, for work must not be neglected, all must work if they would find Truth and escape from Hunger. By this time Truth, who is God the Father, had heard of those who were searching for him, and

sent them a message of pardon for their sins. But a priest, jealous of the priestly privilege of bestowing pardon, declared the message to be false, and in the strife which arose concerning it, the dreamer awoke.

This, very briefly, is the outline of the story. It is full of teaching concerning the duties of the king, the nobles, and the commons, the loveliness of Truth, and the obligation which lies upon all Christians to love one another. There was, it is evident, in the mind of the young poet, a high and beautiful ideal of what life, worthily lived, should be; and his anger and contempt for those who live unworthily proceeded from his intense longing that men should rise to the heights of which, he felt, they were capable.

Time went on, and Will grew to be a man. The friends who had interested themselves in his education were still disposed to help him. In those days the best way to advancement for a poor and penniless youth was through the Church. Will must take orders, and his friends would perhaps be able to find for him some preferment. So he became a clerk. But he felt very strongly within himself that life in the quiet Shropshire village could not long content him. He was moody and restless. He wanted many things which he had not the energy to strive for. "All the sciences under sun and all the subtil crafts, I would I knew and understood well in my heart." But, as he goes on to tell us, he was "eager to learn but loth for to study." He was too ready to follow "Ymaginatif" to give his mind earnestly to any practical work.

Exactly when he left his country home we do not know. He probably spent some time wandering about the country, then came to London. He married, and so cut himself off from all hope of advancement in the Church, for though those who had entered the minor orders only were not forbidden to take wives, there could be no married priests. We know nothing about Langland's wife, except that her name was Katherine, or Kit, as he calls her. A daughter was born to him, whom he named Nicolette or Calote, but of her too we know nothing. The three lived together in a little house in Cornhill, near St Paul's. They were poor—so poor that they sometimes were in want of bread. Langland's poem, *The*

Vision of Piers Plowman, had been finished by this time, and was widely known all over the country, so that many of the poor folk had learnt it by heart, and passed it on from one to another by word of mouth. But it brought in little money, and Langland's earnings in other ways were small. He acted as a chantry priest—that is, he sang masses for the repose of the souls of the dead, he copied manuscripts and wrote out legal documents. Of his life at this time he tells us :

> And I live in London, and on London both,
> The lomes [utensils] that I labour with and livelihood deserve
> Is Paternoster and my primer, placebo and dirige,
> And my psalter sometimes and my seven psalms ;
> Thus I sing for the souls of such as me helpen,
> And those that find me my food.

"It requires no great stretch of imagination," says Professor Skeat, " to picture to ourselves the tall, gaunt figure of Long Will in his long robes and with his shaven head striding along Cornhill, saluting no man by the way, minutely observant of the gay dresses to which he paid no outward reverence." He tells us that " he was loath to reverence lords or ladies, or persons dressed in fur or wearing silver ornaments ; he never would say ' God save you ' to serjeants whom he met, for all of which proud behaviour, then very uncommon, people looked upon him as a fool."

Somewhere about 1377 it is probable that Langland began a new version of his poem. The nation was at this time in a dissatisfied and uneasy state. The Black Prince was dead. Edward III was entirely under the influence of evil advisers, the heir to the throne was a child of twelve. Langland roused himself to a fresh effort. He knew now something of the sorrows of the poor of London, as well as of those who lived among the Malvern Hills. He added to his poem until it was three times the length it had been at first. Almost all the additions that he made increased the value of the work. His version of the well-known fable of the rats who wanted to bell the cat now appeared in the poem for the first time.

In this second version of his poem Langland made a great

change in the character of his ploughman hero. At first he had been simply an honest, God-fearing peasant, whose singleness of purpose stood out in strong contrast to the falsehood and self-seeking of those around him. But now he became a type of perfected human nature, until at last he came to stand for the God-Man, Jesus Christ. He had been a seeker after Truth, he was now Truth itself.

The poem in its new form became almost a gospel to the discontented peasantry, who were in the dangerous, restless state which comes before open rebellion. Piers Plowman they made their hero, the typical working man, who stood for all that was best in their own order. In 1381 came the great Peasant Revolt under Wat Tyler. Langland himself had nothing to do with this, and there was nothing in his poem which can be said to have encouraged it. He taught that strife should end and love should reign between different classes of men, that the king should care for his people and the people should trust their king. But because he exalted a ploughman above rulers and nobles the popular voice acclaimed him as a teacher of rebellion.

The rising of the peasants failed, and we can imagine how Langland grieved over the fate of those his poor brothers on whom punishment had fallen. The case of the peasant seemed more hopeless than ever. Fresh burdens were put upon him, a harder, sterner hand held him down. The misery of it all must have overwhelmed the poet who from his boyhood had suffered in the sufferings of his brethren and who had longed so earnestly for better things. In his poor London home, almost within sight of the destruction which the disastrous rising had caused, he grew ever sadder and more hopeless. His only consolation was the poem which had been the work of his youth and which now, in his old age, he set himself to rewrite once more. This third version was probably begun about 1390. Langland looked back over his past life, recalling, as those who are growing old love to do, the scenes of his earlier days. These he described in his poem, with power still, but power weakened by garrulousness and occasional irrelevance. Before the work was finished he seems to have left London. Where the rest of his life was

spent, and whether with his wife and daughter, or quite alone, we have no means of knowing. In a contemporary poem, *Richard the Redeles,* that has been thought to be by Langland, the author says that in 1399 he was at the city of Bristol. This is the last trace that can be found, though a vague tradition, which we should like to believe, says that he came back to the old Priory among the Malvern Hills to die.

III

THE CANTERBURY TALES

WE have seen how *Piers Plowman* represents the work of its author's whole life, how he put into it all that he had seen and heard and thought and felt from boyhood to age. Quite as truly *The Canterbury Tales* may be said to constitute the life-work of Chaucer. He did not, it is true, work at the poem through long years, altering, adding, and retouching. It is probable that no word of the work was written until Chaucer was nearing fifty, and that it was finished in at most four or five years. But his whole life had been a preparation for it. Through all his crowded, busy years he had been storing up the impressions that his quick brain had registered: he had been learning to know the men and women of the world around him, and to know them so well that he could re-create them in the manner as they lived, and set their living, breathing semblances before his readers. He had been learning, too, the wide charity which could teach his keen, observant eye and mirthful spirit to look upon the weaknesses and foibles of men with kindly indulgence and to laugh at them without bitterness. The technique of his art he had learnt by the best of all methods —practice. He had read, translated, and imitated works of classic fame and works of his own day. We need only read the first few lines of the *Prologue* to realize the difference between his verse and that of Langland. Freedom and ease have come with the final casting off of the bonds which the rigid scheme of Anglo-Saxon verse had bequeathed to Chaucer's Middle English predecessors. The influence of French models has given lightness and grace, the poet's own genius has given the verse harmonies which sound all through his work.

The story of *The Canterbury Tales*, therefore, must include some account of the life of Geoffrey Chaucer. We must watch

the artist gathering his materials and find out, as far as this is possible, how the skill with which they are used was gained.

Our story begins in London about the year 1340. Geoffrey Chaucer, we believe, was born in Thames Street, in a house that stood beside the little stream of Walbrook, which at that time flowed down from Finsbury Moor to the Thames. His father was John Chaucer, vintner, a citizen of wealth and standing who had, at the time of his son's birth, but lately returned from Flanders, where he had gone in attendance on Edward III and Queen Philippa. By the side of London's great river, then a busy highway of trade, the poet grew up. While Will Langland, a moody, restless youth, was wandering solitary over the Malvern Hills, the little lad, Geoffrey Chaucer, was taking his childish part in the busy life of a great city. Lingering in his father's shop, he saw the citizens of various qualities coming in for their draught of wine, and heard their solemn talk over civic affairs, and the state of trade. He saw strange ships coming up the Thames, bringing goods from other lands, and men who looked and spoke in a way that seemed to him curious and uncouth ; like the shipman " woning [dwelling] far by weste " of whom he gives a portrait in the famous *Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales*, who " knew wel alle the havens, as thei were, From Scotland to the cape of Fynestere, And every creek in Bretayne and in Spain." Sometimes, perhaps, the boy went with his father to the Hall of the Hanse Merchants, where sober men with " forked berds " wearing " Flaundrish bever hats spak full solempnely " concerning the " encrease of their wynnyngs " or denounced the pirates who infested the seas between England and the Continent. No part of this experience was lost on him, though he probably gave little sign of the keen interest he felt in all he saw and heard. His father's friends very likely regarded him as a quiet, harmless boy who gave little trouble and sat still longer than boys are wont to do. They were not warned by the humorous twinkle in the quiet boy's eye, and did not know that they were sitting for their portraits for all posterity.

Time went on, and young Geoffrey Chaucer was sent to school, probably to the cathedral school of St Paul's. He

was, we expect, a good scholar, and a source of pride to his master, though he may have been too shy to take part in the proceedings when "upon festival days the masters made solemn meetings in the churches, where their scholars disputed logically and demonstratively; . . . the boys of diverse schools did cap or pot verses, and contended of the principles of grammar; there were some which on the other side with epigrams and rymes, nipping and quipping their fellows and the faults of others, though suppressing their names, moved thereby much laughter among their auditors." Out of school there were many sports in which he might join with his schoolfellows—ball and baton, or running at the quintain set up in Cornhill; or in winter, "when the great fen or moor which watereth the walls of the city on the north side" was frozen, taking part in the play going on there—"some, striding as wide as they may, do slide swiftly; others make themselves seats of ice, as great as millstones, one sits down, many hand in hand to draw him, and one slipping on a sudden, all fall together; some tie bones to their feet and under their heels, and shoving themselves by a little picked staff, do slide as swiftly as a bird flieth in the air, or an arrow out of a crossbow." Perhaps Geoffrey Chaucer liked, almost better than anything else, to sit outside his father's shop in the summer twilight, particularly on festival days like the Eve of St John, and watch how the flames of the bonfires that had been kindled at intervals down the street lit up the faces of the citizens as they stopped to taste the "sweet bread and good drink" which John Chaucer, like others of the "wealthier sort," had set out on a table before his door, "whereunto they would invite their neighbours and passengers also to sit and be merry with them in great familiarity, praising God for his benefits bestowed on them." Then there were the May-day sports, the Midsummer Watch, the Christmas mummings, the pageants, processions, and miracle plays. The life led by the Londoners of the Middle Ages was, at least on one of its sides, a merry one, full of colour and life. Their homes were comfortless, and a long spell of bad weather—such as that which came when Geoffrey Chaucer was about nine years old, when it rained

from Midsummer to Christmas—must have reduced them to despair. But such discomforts only made them the more eager to get all the enjoyment they could from the outdoor life, when this was possible.

To the son of the rich vintner London life showed itself under its most pleasant aspect. He lived, naturally, in an atmosphere of busy prosperity. His father's friends were mostly sober folk, but they had sons and daughters, and there was probably a good deal of laughter and blithe merry-making among the youths and maidens. The comedy of life was spread out before Chaucer, with its ordinary people, its everyday humours, its unheroic incidents. It is thus that he best loved to regard it, though, at the same time, he could rise to heroic heights when the "crowded hour of glorious life" came to him. Nor did tragedy lie outside his keen human sympathy, and in the London streets, then as now, there were tragedies to be seen by those whose eyes were open to note them. It was perhaps in his boyhood, perhaps in later life, that Chaucer saw some poor, pale, trembling wretch, followed by a savage, yelling crowd, dragged to meet the summary justice of those rough days; and the glimpse that he had of the doomed man's face so impressed itself on his mind that years afterward he could convey something of its terror to his readers:

> Have ye not seen some time a palë face,
> Among a press of him that hath been led
> Toward his death, where as him gat no grace,
> And such a colour in his face hath had,
> Men mightë know his face that was bestead
> Amongës all the faces in that rout.

At what time Chaucer's school life ended we do not know. Some of his biographers think that he went to one of the universities, pointing to the knowledge that he had of university customs, and to his portrait of the "Clerk of Oxenford," who "had but a litel gold in cofre: But al that he might of his frendes hente, On bookës and his lernyng he it spent," in support of their conjecture. If he did he must have ended his stay there at an age which was young even for the Middle Ages, when students of thirteen

and fourteen were common at the universities; for in the early part of the year 1357, and probably for some time previously, he was a member of the household of the Duke of Clarence. His father had, we suppose, enough influence at Court to procure for his son the advantage of a training in a great household—an advantage very highly esteemed in those days. For the vintner's house and the London streets were now substituted the crowded palace, and a succession of brilliant scenes of Court life as the Duchess and her train moved in semi-royal progresses through the country.

Chaucer probably held the position of page, whose duty was to give personal attendance to his lady both indoors and out. In the long winter evenings the pages often read aloud to the assembled household, usually from some religious work, or from the romances which were so immensely popular at the period. We can imagine how Chaucer must have delighted in this duty when a happy chance gave him such a romance as *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight*, or *Aucassin and Nicolette* to read, and we can see how the memory of such romances influenced his work in several of his *Canterbury Tales*. But at this time the Romance literature had reached its highest point, and was rapidly declining. The favourite romances of the late fourteenth century were long, stilted, tedious effusions, and it is difficult to see how anyone could have taken much interest in them. But poor Geoffrey Chaucer must needs read them if his noble mistress so willed, and we can see him, as night after night he took up the thread of some interminable, high-flown story—his sly glance round to test the appreciation of his audience, the half-amused impatience which he must hide under an outward appearance of courteous interest. But he remembered these long-winded romances, and when, years afterward, he made fine sport of them in his *Tale of Sir Thopas*, he put into the mouth of the host of the Tabard Inn his long-delayed but not less lively criticism:

> "No more of this, for Goddës dignitee!"
> Quoth our Hostë, "for thou makest me
> So wery of thy very lewëdnesse
> That, also wisly God my soulë blesse,

Myn eerës aken of thy drasty speche.
Thy drasty ryming is not worth a flye;
Thou dost nought else but spendist al our tyme."

In *Long Will*, a novel which deals with the days of Langland and Chaucer, the author has imagined a meeting between the two poets on the Malvern Hills, on the occasion of the train of the Duchess of Clarence stopping for a few nights at Malvern Priory. It is not impossible that such a meeting did take place, though we must fear that it is improbable. Coincidence can scarcely be trusted to have brought about an event so altogether interesting and delightful; but there could be few exercises of the imagination more helpful to the student in forming a conception of the spirit and temper of the two poets than to picture for himself such a meeting.

Chaucer did not long remain in the service of the Duchess. In the autumn of 1359 he was with the army of Edward III in France. He was taken prisoner, and released, in 1360, by the Treaty of Bretigny, on payment of a ransom. He probably returned at once to England. It is difficult to think of Chaucer as a soldier—perhaps he was employed in some other capacity. In any case, his short military experience was of great value to him. It helped him to describe his "verray parfit gentil knight," and to add little details which give an air of reality to his descriptions of various encounters.

The history of the next ten years of Chaucer's life has to be gathered from scanty notices contained in official documents, and from references in his own works. These seem to show that he entered the royal household as "valet of the King's Chamber" soon after 1360, and that while he held this position he fell desperately in love with a lady whose high rank made his suit hopeless. Like Palamon, in his *Knighte's Tale*, he complains:

Thy fresshe beautee sleeth me sodeynly,
And but I have hir mercy and hir grace,
That I may seen her attë lestë weye
I nam but deed; there nis no more to seye.

Some part of the fervour of the language which he uses in his poems written at this time is probably due to the fashion of the day. The necessity which the laws of chivalry laid upon

every true knight of professing a profound devotion to the lady of his love had had a great influence on literature; and the Courts of Love—assemblies of knights and ladies that laid down exact rules as to the behaviour and duties of a lover—had made it incumbent on every poet to write in high-flown, exaggerated style of his lady's beauty and his own passion. The Courts of Love were introduced into England from France, and French influence was at this time at its height in England. Chaucer, living as he did in the very centre of Court influence, was largely affected, as is seen in all the poems he wrote at this period, which is commonly known as his French period.

The opening of the next decade saw the poet entering upon a new series of experiences. Between 1370 and 1380 he was sent on seven diplomatic missions to various countries of Europe. A journey which he made to Italy in 1372 was the most important of these. He was absent nearly twelve months, and visited several Italian cities. At this time Petrarch was living in a small village near Padua, and the early biographers of Chaucer state that a meeting took place between the two poets. There is no reliable evidence that this was so, though it seems highly probable. Chaucer, with all the enthusiasm of a poet conscious of the power to do greater things than any he had yet done, would naturally be anxious to see the older poet who, at nearly seventy years of age, had such a splendid record behind him, not only of works that he had written, but of service rendered in searching out and bringing to light the great works of early classical literature. In *The Canterbury Tales* Chaucer makes his Clerk of Oxenford say :

> I will you tell a talë, which that I
> Lerned at Padowë of a worthy clerk,
> Y provëd by his wordës and his werk.
> He is now ded, and naylèd in his chest,
> I pray to God so yeve his soulë rest!
> Fraunces Petrark, the laureat poète,
> Hightë this clerk, whose retorickë swete
> Illumynd al Ytail of poetrie. . . .
> But forth to tellen of this worthy man,
> That taughte me this tale.

There has been a general belief that in these words Chaucer was referring to his own experiences. The tale is the beautiful story of Griselda, a version of which Petrarch wrote in Latin.

Soon after Chaucer's return from this mission it is probable that he married Philippa, one of the ladies of the Queen's Chamber, who was not the lady of his early love. We know nothing about her, except through references in official documents, and nothing at all about their married life. In 1374 the Corporation of London granted to Chaucer a lease for his life of "the whole of the dwelling-house above the gate of Aldgate, with the rooms built over, and a certain cellar beneath the same gate." A lucrative Court appointment and a pension were given to him, and, with a comfortable income, he settled down to the quiet, studious life which he loved far better than the busy and brilliant scenes in which, so far, the greater part of his time had been of necessity passed. Not far away Langland in his poor house on Cornhill was living hardly and toiling at work which was distasteful to him, and, through all, building up his great poem. Chaucer, too, was busy; he was producing work which showed in a very marked manner the influence of his stay in Italy, and of the study of Italian literature which the visit had inspired. When the work that his appointment required was done he came back to his rooms at Aldgate, and there in the city he loved, with the sounds of busy life coming up from the street below and giving him the sense of human companionship that was so necessary to him, he sat down to study and to write. He says of himself in his *House of Fame*:

> Thou herest neyther that nor this,
> For when thy labour doon al ys,
> And hast made al thy rekennynges,
> Instede of reste and newë thynges,
> Thou goost home to thy house anoon,
> And, al so domb as any stoon,
> Thou sittest at another booke,
> Tyl fully dasewyd ys thy looke,
> And lyvest thus as an heremyte,
> Although thyn abstynence ys lite.

In this last line Chaucer, in his own characteristic manner, pokes sly fun at himself. His "abstinence is little," he is no

ascetic, but enjoys all the good things of this world, including good things to eat and drink.

This quiet life was not uninterrupted. Other missions, followed by other grants and rewards, were undertaken from time to time. He does not seem to have gone abroad after 1380, but the duties of his various appointments kept his time well occupied at home. In 1386 the tide of his good fortune turned. King Edward III had died in 1377, and the young king was in the hands of guardians. Of these John of Gaunt had always been Chaucer's great friend and supporter; but now John of Gaunt was abroad, and the Duke of Gloucester was at the head of affairs. He regarded Chaucer as a supporter of the party opposed to his own, and dismissed him from his posts. Soon we find Chaucer in money difficulties, raising small sums on the two pensions that remained to him—though these also two years after were taken away. In 1387 his wife died. Yet in this, the darkest hour of his life, he lost neither courage nor energy. In the midst of poverty and distress he began his *Canterbury Tales*, the greatest of all his works.

The worst pressure of poverty was removed when, in 1389, the Lancastrian party was restored to power, and Chaucer was appointed Clerk of the King's Works at Westminster. Other small appointments and pensions followed, but the poet seems never again to have been in comfortable circumstances. Perhaps in the dark years from 1386 to 1389 he had become so deeply involved in debt that he was unable to clear himself. However this may be, the last ten years of his life were undoubtedly shadowed by poverty, and probably by ill-health. The brilliant, successful days were over, but the poet did not sit down and sigh for what he had lost. He did better than that; by the power of his imagination he recreated the past, and in his lonely rooms above the Aldgate gateway he called up around him the figures which had been familiar to his boyhood and earlier manhood, and gave to them a certain immortality. All that he had learnt of men, of life, and of books, all that he had felt, and enjoyed, and suffered, all the unquenchable fun and humour that had survived his troubles, all the fine charity and mellow judgment

that years had brought, these the genius of the poet wrought into his great crowning, representative work.

The French and Italian influences which had so strongly affected Chaucer's earlier poems had by this time lost their predominance and become only single elements in the whole vast mass of memories that were shaping his work. *The Canterbury Tales* are entirely English in tone and spirit. The main idea of the framework is essentially English. Twenty-nine pilgrims, bound for the shrine of St Thomas at Canterbury, meet at a London inn. They agree to travel together, and agree also, at the suggestion of the host, each to tell two stories to enliven the way. Only twenty-four of the stories were written, and these, with the wonderful *Prologue*, make up *The Canterbury Tales*. It is interesting to consider each of the characters and each of the stories in connexion with the known facts of Chaucer's life, and to note the wonderful skill with which he has used the material that his varied experience has provided.

He gives us, incidentally, a portrait of himself in his later years, for he himself is one of the pilgrims whom he represents as taking part in that memorable ride. The host of the Tabard Inn thus addresses him :

> Oure Host to japë then bigan
> And then at erst he lokëd upon me,
> And saydë thus : " What man art thou ? " quoth he.
> " Thou lokest as thou woldest fynde an hare,
> For ever upon the ground I see thee stare.
> Approchë near, and lokë up merily.
> Now ware you, sirs, and let this man have place.
> He in the waist is shape as wel as I ;
> This were a popet in an arm to embrace
> For any woman, smal and fair of face.
> He semeth elvish by his countenance,
> For unto no wight doth he daliaunce.[1]

Chaucer, it seems, had grown portly as the years had gone on. His retiring habits had been strengthened, and he went about, avoiding as far as possible the notice of his fellows. But his interest in life had not decreased, and his downcast eyes were as keenly observant as they had ever been.

The Canterbury Tales were probably begun in 1388, and

as each was finished it was given to the public. The *Tales* won immediate popularity. Chaucer's fellow-poets recognized that a greater than themselves had arisen, and they gave him warm and generous praise. Nothing like this had been seen before in England ; even Chaucer's own earlier works could not compare with his latest achievement. Here was true poetry, breadth of movement, free and generous character-painting. A new era in the history of poetry had opened, a way had been made in which other men might follow. The sky was bright with promise of a great time to come.

At the end of 1399 Chaucer removed from his Aldgate dwelling to a house in the garden of the Chapel of St Mary, Westminster, and here, less than a year afterward, he died. As far as we know he left no descendants ; his one son, Lewis, probably died young. Chaucer was buried in Westminster Abbey, and about two hundred years later a monument was erected to his memory, which was the beginning of what is now known as " Poets' Corner."

Fifty manuscripts of the *Tales* are known to be in existence at the present time. Not one of these copies was made in Chaucer's lifetime, but several date from the fifty years that followed his death. Caxton printed *The Canterbury Tales* at his press at Westminster in 1478 and again in 1483. In his preface to this edition he praised the book with great warmth. " He [Chaucer] excelleth in my opinion," he wrote, " all other writers in English ; for he writeth no void words, but all his matter is full of high and quick sentence."

Chaucer continued to be held in high esteem until toward the end of the sixteenth century. His fame declined steadily throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, although during that period he received generous appreciation from the poet Dryden, whose pronouncement, " Here is God's plenty," still stands, by virtue of its terseness and comprehensiveness, first among all the critical judgments that have been passed upon *The Canterbury Tales*. There seemed to be a chance that the works of our first great English poet would pass into the ranks of the unread books, which are only remembered because they once were famous.

But toward the end of the eighteenth century came a change. A new edition of Chaucer's works was published by Thomas Tyrwhitt, and this gave a great impulse to Chaucerian study. During the nineteenth century Chaucer regained his former position, and stands now, by common consent, in the very front rank of great poets, with Shakespeare, Milton, and Spenser.

IV

WYCLIF'S BIBLE

THERE is no work which has had such an immense influence on the language and literature of England as the English translation of the Bible. From the sixteenth century onward it has coloured both the literary diction of our great writers, and the common speech of the people. Milton's style may be said to be founded upon it Ruskin declared that any excellencies his own prose writings possess are due to the fact that his mother made him, during his boyhood, read the whole Bible through every year, and learn large portions by heart. It is seldom, indeed, that one can read even a few pages of any great author without being able to trace the influence of the Bible either in the phraseology or the turns of the sentences. In the everyday speech of ordinary people there is a large, unconscious admixture of Biblical language, which marks how thoroughly the English Bible has become the property of the English nation. As a piece of literature, entirely apart from its supreme value as the sacred book of the Christian religion, the Bible holds a unique and remarkable position.

Many names are connected with the story of the English Bible, and one of the most honoured of these is John Wyclif. Wyclif, like Chaucer, belonged to that great awakening period of the fourteenth century when it seemed as if the mental habits of the Middle Ages were breaking up, and new ideals, new methods, and new standards were to take the place of the old. The movement, as we shall see, died out, but the work of Wyclif as well as the work of Chaucer remained, and exercised a great and lasting influence on the literature of succeeding ages.

Nothing in Wyclif's early life gave any promise of the work he was to do in his later years. He belonged to an old and

wealthy north-country family, and was born about 1324. He went to the University of Oxford, where he greatly distinguished himself, and when he was about thirty-five he became Master of Balliol College. Soon he was known as the foremost of the Schoolmen. The great educational movement of the Middle Ages was Scholasticism, which began to emerge from earlier systems in the eighth century, reached its height in the thirteenth, then gradually died away until the Renaissance brought it to extinction. It consisted in the study of early Latin philosophic writings, and the application of the principles laid down in these to the teaching of the Church. If the two would not readily agree they were commented upon and their meaning twisted until it was possible to fit them into the accepted scheme. Naturally such a system gave rise to endless arguments on minute points, and the man who could best follow out a long and complicated chain of reasoning in which the finest distinctions were made and the subtlest of arguments introduced was accounted the best scholar. To do this adequately, it must be remembered, required an acquaintance with almost all that it was then possible to learn of science, mathematics, and literature. But the splitting of straws sometimes reached a point where it became not only futile, but absurd. We are told, for example, that these grave and learned Schoolmen, arguing upon the nature and constitution of the angels, occupied themselves in a profound discussion as to how many of these beings could stand on the point of a needle.

Among these subtle metaphysicians Wyclif, as has been said, stood first. His fine keen mind delighted in matching itself against other minds in strenuous logical exercises, and for a time this seems to have occupied a great part of his energies. But soon his study of the Scriptures and of ecclesiastical matters gave him more serious and engrossing subjects of thought. Here were questions of living interest, involving men's welfare in this world and in the world to come. The Church on earth was very far from the ideal state which, theoretically, was hers. Greed, oppression, and corruption sullied her, and she had ceased to fulfil her great mission. Wyclif turned from subtle disquisitions on abstract

subjects to the consideration of the practical abuses of his time.

The great fight, which was to go on throughout the last twenty years of Wyclif's life, began. He was not the first fighter, but he was the strongest and most determined that had yet appeared. His frail body, worn by study and discipline, matched but ill his strong and resolute spirit. He was, says one of his followers, "held by many the holiest of all in his day, lean of body, spare and almost deprived of strength, most pure in his life." He faced not only the thunders of the Pope, but the yells and shouts of angry mobs with a fine courage; and never wavered in the position which he had taken up. A band of devoted followers gathered round him, for he seems to have possessed that personal charm which is so often a characteristic of leaders in great movements. Some of his friends were powerful enough to give him valuable protection, and chief of these was John of Gaunt, though in his case it was not any special care for Wyclif and his work which supplied the motive, but, rather, considerations of policy. It is not proposed to tell here in detail the story of Wyclif's long struggle: how from criticizing the practice of the Church he advanced to a criticism of her doctrine, and so lost his most powerful friends; how he organized his band of 'Poor Priests,' and sent them throughout England to teach the pure Word of God; how the band of 'Lollards,' as his followers were mockingly called, increased in numbers and in enthusiasm. All these things belong to history, but not to the history of Wyclif's Bible. We will take up the story at the point when Wyclif, expelled from Oxford and condemned by the Archbishop's council, settled down in his little parish of Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, retiring for a breathing-space from the thickest of the conflict.

The days of active fighting were over, but Wyclif's work was not yet done. The old man of sixty had yet to accomplish that which, of itself, would have sufficed to make his name famous throughout the ages. For many years he had earnestly desired that the Bible might be rendered into the native tongue of the people. Christ, said Wyclif, when He was on earth with His disciples, "taughte hem oute this prayer

[the Lord's Prayer] bot be thou syker, nother in Latin, nother in Frensche, bot in the langage that they used to speke." When, therefore, a time of comparative leisure came to him he eagerly took up the work of translation. Several of his followers were with him at Lutterworth. There was John Purvey, his curate, who had several times suffered persecution and imprisonment for what the Church called his heretical opinions. There was Nicholas Hereford, a scholar, who had worked with Wyclif at Oxford, and like him had been cited before the council at London; and there were others of less note. The translation was the joint work of the band, and it is probable that Wyclif himself only translated a part of the New Testament. But he was the inspiration of all that was done, and the resulting version of the Scriptures may with justice be called Wyclif's Bible.

The English were at this time not entirely without native versions of the Scriptures. The earliest of these was Cædmon's paraphrase, which belongs to the seventh century. Alfred the Great, in the ninth century, translated the Psalms, the Commandments, the 21st, 22nd, and part of the 23rd chapters of Exodus. Other versions of the various parts of the Bible—the Gospels, the Pentateuch, and the historical books—were probably in existence before the Conquest, judging from the evidence of the literature of the time, but these have been lost. In the twelfth or early thirteenth century Orm, a monk of the Order of Augustine, wrote a metrical version of the Gospels and the Acts, which extended to 20,000 lines. This is known as *Orm's Ormulum*. Early in the fourteenth century William of Shoreham translated the Psalms, of which several other versions had been made by unknown authors during the century preceding.

All these translations Wyclif might have had to help him in his work, but we do not think he consulted any of them. His translation was made from the Vulgate, the Latin version of the Bible made by St Jerome about 383. Neither Wyclif nor his disciples understood the original Greek or Hebrew. Latin was the language of the Schoolmen; Greek came only with the Renaissance. The translation was designed for simple and unlearned men, and this the translators seem to

have kept well in mind throughout. The language is simple and vigorous, the true language of the people, though it sometimes becomes awkward and stilted by following too closely the idiom of the Latin original. Their rendering of part of Psalm viii may be given as a specimen :

1. Lord oure Lord ; hou myche mervellous is thi name in al the erthe.
2. For rered up is thi grete doing, over hevenes.
3. Of the mouth of unspekende childer and soukende thou performedist preising, for thin enemys ; that thou destroye the enemy and the ventiere.
4. For I shal see thin hevenes, the werkis of thi fingris ; the mone and the sterris, that thou hast founded.

For the last two years of Wyclif's life (1382–84) he was, one of his early biographers tells us, partially paralysed. But in spite of this the amount of work he is known to have done is enormous. Tract after tract was issued and sent through the country, written in the homely, vigorous prose characteristic of him. His sermons and his duties at the parish church were not neglected. He died on the last day of the year 1384.

After Wyclif's death it is probable that John Purvey undertook a revision and retranslation of the Bible, at which they had worked together. This version is freer in its style than the previous one, and is not such an absolutely literal translation of the Latin. The method employed is set down by the translator in his very interesting preface. "A simple creature," he says, "hath translated the Bible out of Latin into English. First this simple creature had much travail, with divers fellows and helpers, to gather many old Bibles and other doctors' and common glosses, and to make one Latin Bible some deal true ; and then to study it anew, the text with the gloss and other doctors as he might get, and specially Lire [Nicholas de Lyra, a celebrated commentator on the Scriptures] on the Old Testament, that helped full much in this work ; the third time to counsel with old grammarians and old divines, of hard words and hard sentences, how they might best be understood and translated ; the fourth time to translate as clearly as he could to the sense, and to have many good fellows and cunning at the correcting of the translation."

Both these versions were extensively used among the people, until the growing feeling against Lollardry caused them to be prohibited, because they were the work of Lollard writers. But no very active steps were taken, and many faithful Churchmen possessed copies of the Wyclifite versions of the Holy Scriptures. One hundred and seventy manuscripts of Wyclif's Bible are still in existence, testifying to the number which must have been made in the days before printing became common.

V

THE FAERIE QUEENE

EDMUND SPENSER had been appointed Private Secretary to Lord Grey de Wilton, the new Lord Deputy, and in August 1580 he left England for Ireland, where he remained for nearly ten years.

In Ireland Spenser entered into a new world. The Desmond rebellion was at its height, and Lord Grey took the sternest measures to quell it. The state of the country was terrible. Death in warfare, death from an ambushed foe, death by treachery, death by pestilence, death by starvation, death at the hands of the public executioner—these were so common that men had almost ceased to look upon them with horror. The land was laid desolate. "The curse of God was so great, and the land so barren both of man and beast, that whosoever did travel from one end to the other of all Munster, even from Waterford to Smerwick, about six score miles, he should not meet man, woman, or child saving in cities or towns, nor yet see any beasts save foxes, wolves, or other ravening beasts."

Lord Grey left Ireland in 1582, but Spenser remained behind, and held in the years that followed various offices under the Government. In 1586 he received a grant of the manor and castle of Kilcolman, a ruined house that had belonged to the family of the Desmonds, and there he lived from that time forward. Kilcolman was in the midst of one of the most dangerous and disaffected districts in all Ireland. North of it stretched a desolate tract, half forest, half bog, which extended far across Munster, and here lurked savage wolves and savage men. The Desmonds had their "great fastness" in its dreary depths, and outlaws and rebels congregated there, making it a place of terror. The country immediately surrounding Spenser's house had a wild beauty.

In front lay a small lake, and the Galtee Mountains rose behind. Spenser has celebrated "Arlo, the best and fairest hill in all the holy island's heights," and the "soft rombling brooks" which run from it through the defiles in the mountains. "A most beautifull and sweet countrey as any is under heaven," it would have been, had not man laid his desolating hand upon it.

Such was the home in which Edmund Spenser wrote his great poem *The Faerie Queene*. For a long time he had been thinking over it, and as early as 1579 some portion had been written. This was submitted to Gabriel Harvey—a noted Cambridge scholar of his day and the friend and literary guide of both Sidney and Spenser—for his criticism. Harvey did not think very highly of it; it was too startling a departure from classical tradition to win his approval. He was surprised that Spenser himself should regard it as a really serious piece of work, and he prayed that God or some good angel would put his friend in a better mind. But, happily, no such better mind came to Spenser, and as soon as his official duties gave him leisure he took up, at lonely Kilcolman, the work on which his heart had so long been set. During the three most eventful years in Elizabeth's reign —the year of Sidney's death and Shakespeare's appearance in London, the year of the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, the year of the great Armada—*The Faerie Queene* came into being. Amid scenes of strife and misery and crime, and poverty in its most revolting forms, without, as far as we can tell, companionship or encouragement, Spenser worked on.

Many elements went to the making of his great work. He put into it, as a true poet must, the best of himself and of what life had given him. He did not, as Chaucer had done when he set himself to write *The Canterbury Tales*, look back over his life and re-create the scenes and the people that had been familiar to him. Spenser, like Chaucer, was born and bred in London. But the years he had spent there seem to have left little impression upon his mind. He wrote, it is true, in one of his poems, of "merry London my most kindly nurse," but we cannot recognize in the stories of

The Facrie Queene the figures of any of those with whom he must have been familiar in his home, in the streets, or at the school of the Merchant Taylors' Company where he was educated. Save for a few references to "Cleopolis, the fairest citty that might be seen," there is nothing to indicate that Spenser was familiar with Elizabeth's great capital.

The reason for this difference between *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Faerie Queene* lies in the different natures of the two poets. Spenser was more highly imaginative than Chaucer. He had not so keen an appreciation of the common things of life, but loved, rather, that which was strange and unusual. He had, too, a delight in beauty beyond what is common, even in poets. Beauty of form, of colour, of sound, and, above all, moral and spiritual beauty he loved with a great passion. Lovely shapes flitted before his eyes. He saw the white radiance of truth, the enchanting grace of courtesy, the grave loveliness of temperance with such a rapture of realization that he must needs make for himself some image to embody his conception and receive his worship. These images turned to living men and women beneath his hand, but they were not the men and women of common earth. Theirs must be a country of mystery and wonder; and Fortune was good to Spenser in leading him to his lonely Irish home. For certainly not in England could he have found a region which would have helped his imagination to picture that country as wild Ireland helped it. There he found the dark background against which his visionary men and women showed like forms of light; there were the forests "not perceable with power of any starr," the "wilderness and wastful deserts" where they adventured like fairy knights and ladies in the days when the world was young, yet with the grace and dignity of high-born courtiers of the great Queen. There, too, was the bestial crew of savage and treacherous foemen, who should test the knight's valour and the lady's purity.

Yet there was a stern Puritan strain in Spenser's nature that made it impossible for him to abandon himself entirely to these seductive dreams of beauty. He could not justify

himself in his own eyes if he produced a work which had no high moral purpose. His conception of a poet—a conception common to his time—was that he should be first of all a great teacher. To this end he fashioned his work. It was to be, essentially, an exposition of spiritual and moral truth. "The generall end of all the booke," he wrote, later, to his friend Sir Walter Raleigh, "is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline: which for that I conceived shoulde be most plausible and pleasing, being coloured with an historicall fiction. . . . I chose the historye of King Arthure. . . . I labour to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morall vertues, as Aristotle hath devised; the which is the purpose of these first twelve bookes which if I finde to be well accepted, I may be perhaps encoraged to frame the other part of polliticke vertues in his person, after hee came to be king."

The work, therefore, is an allegory, in which the characters represent certain virtues and vices. But Spenser put into it more than this. He had a lively concern in what was happening around him, and like most Elizabethans he was a keen politician; moreover, his short experience at Court had taught him that some part of the scheme of his poem must allow of the introduction of extravagant praise and flattery addressed to the Queen. For these reasons *The Faerie Queene* became a double allegory; the characters were made to take on a second signification, and to stand for important political characters of the day. Nor does this complete the "allegorical tangle." "In the Faerie Queene," says Spenser, "I meane Glory in my general intention: but in my particular I conceive the most excellent and glorious person of our soveraine the Queene and her kingdome in Fairyland." "And yet," he goes on, "in some places els, I doe otherwise shadow her. For considering she beareth two persons, the one of a most royall Queene or Empresse, the other of a most vertuous and beautifull Lady, the latter part in some places I doe expresse in Belphœbe." And so with other characters of the poem. They stand variously for several personages, as well as for a moral quality.

Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare

All this is very perplexing, and if the reader tries conscientiously to keep all the different threads clear in his mind as he reads his enjoyment of the poem will be sadly marred. But he need not do this. Spenser himself often forgets all about his allegory and loses himself in the sheer delight of the story. The best way to read *The Faerie Queene* is to consider it simply as a beautiful fairy story, and disregard altogether the allegorical intention. Then nothing but pure pleasure can result.

The first three books of the poem were finished when, in 1589, Sir Walter Raleigh came to Kilcolman. He was, for the time, out of favour with the Queen ; his rival, Essex, was in the ascendant. Raleigh thought it best to leave England, and he came over to Ireland to look after the estates he held there. Spenser, in his poem *Colin Clout's Come Home Again*, has told the story of Raleigh's visit. In this poem the rustic style of *The Shepheard's Calendar* is again adopted, and Spenser is Colin Clout and Raleigh the Shepheard of the Ocean, who appears before his friend and complains of the hardness of his lot.

> His song was all a lamentable lay
> Of great unkindness and of usage hard,
> Of Cynthia, the Ladie of the Sea,
> Which from her presence faultlesse him debar'd.

Spenser, to divert his friend's mind from these sorrows, brought out the first three books of *The Faerie Queene.* Raleigh's fine and cultured critical taste at once saw the merit of the poem, and he urged Spenser to bring it to the Court of Elizabeth ; or, as Colin Clout tells the story :

> He gan to cast great lyking to my lore,
> And great dislyking to my lucklesse lot,
> That banisht had myselfe, like wight forlore,
> Into that waste, where I was quite forgot.
> The which to leave, thenceforth he counseld mee,
> Unmeet for man in whom was ought regardfull,
> And wend with him, his Cynthia for to see ;
> Whose grace was great, and bounty most rewardfull ; . . .

So what with hope of good and hate of ill,
He me perswaded forth with him to fare.
Nought took I with me but nine oaten quill;
Small needments else need shepheard to prepare.

The two friends crossed the sea, and made their appearance at the Court of Elizabeth. To Raleigh's great delight, the mood of his royal mistress had changed. Cynthia smiled upon him once more, and upon his poet-companion.

The Shepheard of the Ocean (quoth he)
Unto that Goddesse grace me first enhanced,
And to my oaten pipe inclined her eare,
That she thenceforth therein 'gan take delyht;
And it desired at timely houres to heare,
All were my notes but rude and roughly dight;

Spenser soon perfected himself in the courtier's art of flattery, and doubtless Elizabeth afterward read with complete satisfaction his account of the impression she at this time made upon his mind.

But if I her like ought on earth might read,
I would her lyken to a crown of lillies,
Upon a virgin brydes adornëd head,
With Roses dight and Goolds and Daffadillies.

He proceeds in this strain for some time, and, finding his powers quite unequal to giving any adequate idea of her transcendent qualities, he concludes:

More fit it is t'adore with humble mind
The image of the heavens in shape humane.

Either in gratitude for this praise, or in acknowledgment of the great merit of *The Faerie Queene*, Elizabeth gave to Spenser a pension of fifty pounds a year.

Spenser next made his appeal to a larger public. The following entry is to be found in the register of the Stationers' Company, under the date December 1, 1589. "Entered . . . a book intytuled the fayrye Queene dysposed into xij bookes &c, authorysed under thandes of the Archbishop of Canterbery and bothe the Wardens." The poem being thus

authorized, the first three books were published in 1590, with a dedication to the Queen :

To
The Most High, Mightie and Magnificent
Empresse,
Renowned for piety, vertue, and all gratious government,
ELIZABETH,
By the Grace of God,
Queene of England, Fraunce, and Ireland, and of Virginia,
Defendeur of the Faith, &c.,
Her most humble Servaunt
Edmund Spenser
Doth in all humilitie
Dedicate, present, and consecrate
These his labours,
To live with the eternitie of her fame.

The claim is a bold one—"To live with the eternitie of her fame"; but it has been justified.

It would be impossible here even to outline all the stories contained in *The Faerie Queene*. We will quote Spenser's own account of his general plan, and then deal, very briefly, with the First Book. "I devise," he says in the letter to Raleigh, part of which has been already quoted, "that the Faery Queene kept her Annuall feaste xii dayes; uppon which xii severall dayes, the occasions of the xii severall adventures hapned, which being undertaken by xii severall knights, are in these xii books severally handled and discoursed. The first was this. In the beginning of the feast, there presented him selfe a tall clownishe younge man, who falling before the Queene of Faeries desired a boone (as the manner then was) which during that feast she might not refuse; which was that hee might have the achievement of any adventure, which during that feaste should happen: that being graunted, he rested him on the floore, unfitte through his rusticity for a better place. Soone after entred a faire Ladye in mourning weedes, riding on a white Asse, with a dwarfe behinde her leading a warlike steed, that bore the Armes of a knight, and his speare in the dwarfe's hand. Shee, falling before the Queene of Faeries, complayned that her father and mother, an ancient King and Queene, had beene by an huge dragon many years shut up in a brasen Castle, who thence

suffered them not to yssew; and therefore besought the Faery Queene to assygne her some one of her knights to take on him that exployt. Presently that clownish person, upstarting, desired that adventure: whereat the Queene much wondering and the Lady much gainsaying yet he earnestly importuned his desire. In the end the Lady told him, that unlesse that armour which she brought would serve him (that is, the armour of a Christian man specified by Saint Paul, Ephes. vi) that he could not succeed in that enterprise; which being forthwith put upon him, with dew furnitures thereunto, he seemed the goodliest man in al that company and was well liked of the lady. And eftsoones taking on him knighthood, and mounting on that straunge courser, he went forth with her on that adventure: where beginneth the first booke, viz.

A gentle knight was pricking on the plaine, &c.

This "tall clownishe younge man" is the Knight of Holiness, afterward St George, the patron saint of England. The lady is Una, or Truth, one of the loveliest in all the bright throng of Spenser's heroines. It is she who upholds her knight through the toils and adventures of their quest, who reclaims him from error, strengthens him when he is weak, and rewards him in the hour of victory. Spenser gives, throughout the book, a series of pictures of Una. He shows her first when she starts with the Red Cross Knight:

A lovely Ladie rode him faire beside,
Upon a lowly Asse more white then snow,
Yet she much whiter, but the same did hide
Under a vele, that wimpled was full low,
And over all a black stole shee did throw,
As one that inly mournd: so was she sad,
And heavie sat upon her palfrey slow;
Seemed in heart some hidden care she had.
And by her in a line a milk white lambe she lad.

And again:

One day nigh wearie of the yrksome way,
From her unhastie beast she did alight,
And on the grasse her dainty limbs did lay
In secret shadow, farre from all men's sight:

From her fayre head her fillet she undight,
And layd her stole aside. Her angel's face
As the great eye of heaven shyned bright;
And made a sunshine in the shadie place;
Did never mortall eye behold such heavenly grace.

Marvels of every kind meet the knight and his lady as they proceed on their journey. In "a hollow cave amid the thickest woods" they encounter the foul monster Error, whom the knight slays. He becomes subject to the spells of an Enchanter, Archemago, who deceives him by means of false dreams, brought from the house of Morpheus, where

A trickling streame from high rock tumbling downe,
And ever-drizling raine upon the loft,
Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne
Of swarming Bees, did cast him in a swowne:
No other noyse, nor people's troublous cryes,
As still are wont t'annoy the walled towne,
Might there be heard; but careless Quiet lyes,
Wrapt in eternall silence far from enemyes.

The knight forsakes Una, and takes another lady, the false Duessa. Una, "forsaken, wofull, solitarie mayd" wanders "through woods and wastnesse wide" seeking her champion; a lion constitutes himself her bodyguard, until he is slain by the Paynim Knight, Sansloy; from Sansloy Una is rescued by a troupe of Faunes and Satyres, and for a time she lives with them in the wood as their queen, teaching them "trew sacred lore, which from her sweet lips did redound." From this wood, by the help of the rustic Knight Satyrane, she escapes, meets Prince Arthur, and is courteously protected by him. Meanwhile the Red Cross Knight is taken by Duessa to the House of Pride, where he fights with and overcomes Sansjoy, brother to Sansfoy and Sansloy. By the arts of Duessa, Sansjoy is conveyed from the field, and taken to regions below the earth to be cured. The knight, warned by his attendant dwarf, who has seen the horrors in the secret parts of the House of Pride, steals away the next morning, is taken prisoner by the giant Orgoglio, and rescued by Prince Arthur, whom Una brings to his aid, she having met the dwarf and learnt from him of his master's

plight. Orgoglio is killed and his house overthrown by Prince Arthur. The Red Cross Knight, feeble and unfit for warfare, is taken by Una to the House of Holiness, where he is strengthened and made ready for his struggle with the dragon, the end of his quest. For two days he fights with this terrible monster, and at last kills him, and rescues Una's father and mother. The last canto is taken up with an account of the betrothal and marriage of Una and the Red Cross Knight.

The second book deals in a similar manner with the adventures of Sir Guyon, the Knight of Temperance; the third with those of Britomart, the maiden Knight of Chastity.

For about a year and a half after the publication of the first three books of *The Faerie Queene* Spenser remained in England, enjoying the fame which his work had brought him. Everywhere he was acclaimed as a great poet; generous and lavish praise was poured upon him by his brother-poets and men of letters. During this year and a half he wrote several of his shorter poems. Then, disappointed that his great work had not brought him some substantial result in the shape of a liberal pension or a lucrative office, he returned to Ireland. Here, in 1594, he married; and though we know nothing at all about his wife except that her name was Elizabeth, the glorious marriage hymn, *Epithalamium*, which her husband wrote in her honour, raises her in our imaginations to a place beside the radiant figures of Una and Britomart. At Kilcolman, lonely no longer, Spenser during the following year finished the next three books of *The Faerie Queene*, of which the heroes are the Knight of Friendship, the Knight of Justice, the Knight of Courtesy. In 1595 he came to England to see after the publication of these books, which completed the first half of his projected work. In less than a year he was back in Ireland. He took up the life which, in spite of some hankerings after the splendour of the Court and the cultured society which London alone could afford, he really loved the best. Children were born to him, he had leisure for the work in which he delighted, his home was lovely and peaceful. But peace in the Ireland of that time was, as Spenser well knew, an insecure possession. In 1598

a new rebellion broke out. The rebels poured from their fastness on Arlo Hill and Kilcolman was sacked and burnt. Spenser and his wife, broken-hearted, escaped to Cork, and then to England. A few months later, January 16, 1599, Spenser died. There is a tradition, founded on a statement of Ben Jonson, that he died in want. "He died," said Jonson, "for lack of bread, in King Street, Westminster, and refused twenty pieces sent to him by my Lord of Essex, saying that he had no time to spend them." But there is no confirmation of this statement, and it seems unlikely that it is true. Spenser was buried, with all honour, in Westminster Abbey, near the grave of his great predecessor, Chaucer.

We do not know how much more of his great work was completed before his death. Perhaps the fire at Kilcolman robbed us of many cantos we might otherwise have had. One fragment on *Mutabilitie*, supposed to be part of the book of Constancy, was printed with the other six books, by a bookseller, in 1609, but where it came from we do not know. The work remains incomplete, but even in its incompleteness it suffices to give Spenser a place in the front rank of our poets.

VI

THE PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE

I

THE year 1564 was of all years the most important for the Elizabethan drama. In the stormy days of February was born the wild and unhappy genius, Christopher Marlowe; and when gusty March had passed and the rain and sunshine of April had made the earth beautiful, there came into it another, a greater, and a happier genius, William Shakespeare. He was born in one of the loveliest districts of the English Midlands. The quiet Avon flowed through it, and on either side of the river there stretched, in Shakespeare's day, wide, rich meadow-lands, starry and fragrant with "daisies pied and violets blue, and lady-smocks all silver-white." Wild flowers grew along the riverbanks, and in every shady woodland glade—"pale primroses" and "bold oxlips," the "azured harebell" and the "lush eglantine." To the north lay the Forest of Arden, then really a forest, and a paradise of woodland beauty. If there was nothing grand or wild to fire the imagination there was everywhere a sweet and peaceful loveliness that stirred the heart.

On the left bank of the Avon, just where the old Roman road had crossed the river by means of a ford, stood the little town of Stratford. A fine stone bridge, which is still standing, had replaced the ford, and the grey church—old even when Shakespeare was a lad—stood by the riverside. Quaint streets of dark-timbered houses made up the little town. The house in Henley Street, where Shakespeare was born, was gabled and picturesque, like its neighbours, with small, low-ceilinged rooms and heavy oaken beams. John Shakespeare, the poet's father, had been living there for twelve

years at the time of his son's birth. He was a trader in all sorts of farm produce, especially in wool, leather, and meat, so that he has been variously described as a glover, butcher, and farmer. He belonged to an old yeoman family that had been settled in Warwickshire for many generations. He was a busy and prosperous man, standing high in the estimation of his fellow-townsmen. In 1565 he became an alderman of Stratford, and in 1568 reached the dignity of Bailiff or Mayor.

William Shakespeare grew up in a comfortable home, well supplied with the necessities of life, and probably also with such luxuries as the age afforded. He grew up also with that sense of belonging to a family well reputed and highly esteemed, which is so important an element in a wholesome and stimulating self-respect. From his father it does not seem likely that he received very much help or guidance. John Shakespeare appears to have been one of those well-meaning but ineffectual men, of restless energy and short-sighted optimism, who take up with enthusiasm a number of projects, but fail to make a lasting success of anything. He was constantly 'going to law,' and it is probable that his son William owes the knowledge of legal procedure and legal terms which has led some critics to declare that he must have been familiar with the work of a lawyer's office to the conversations which he heard at home about his father's many lawsuits. These, however, during his early boyhood, were mainly concerned with the recovery of small debts, and did not affect the prosperity of the family. John Shakespeare's position in the town, joined with his genial, social temper, and the quiet, high-bred courtesy of his wife—she was of gentle birth, and, in a modest way, an heiress—must have attracted many visitors to the house in Henley Street, and made it a centre of social as well as of family life.

In due time, as we believe, William Shakespeare went to the old Grammar School of Stratford-on-Avon. Here most of his time was spent in the study of Latin, and he learned to read with a fair amount of facility the Latin authors of the ordinary schoolboy. Lilly's Latin Grammar, then universally used in schools, he probably knew by heart, for he quotes sentences from it in *Love's Labour's Lost* and in *The Merry*

Wives of Windsor. Sir Hugh Evans (*Merry Wives*), the pedantic Holofernes (*Love's Labour's Lost*), and the conjuring schoolmaster Pinch (*Comedy of Errors*) probably embody many of Shakespeare's recollections of the masters who taught him at the Stratford Grammar School.

We have no record of Shakespeare's schooldays, nothing to tell us whether he ranked with the good boys or with the dunces, no hint as to who were his friends, or, most important of all, how he occupied himself when school was over. Doubtless he played with the other boys at the games which were popular in Elizabethan days. But we think that he must have spent a great deal of his time in roaming over the lovely country which lay around his home, learning its features so well that through all his years in London they were never forgotten; making friends with all the shepherds, pedlars, innkeepers, village constables, sextons—even with the beggars and the village 'innocents'—to be found in the countryside; listening to all the stories they could be induced to tell him; picking up local traditions, old ballads, proverbs, and folk-tales; learning the homely, racy, expressive English which the good yeoman of the Midlands had at command. We know that he must have taken a keen interest in the field-sports of the neighbourhood, for he shows in his plays a familiar acquaintance with hunting, hawking, and coursing, and metaphors drawn from them are common. Yet if we may judge from the two most notable references in his works, his sympathies were often with the hunted, not with the hunter. He noted the "poor sequester'd stag That from the hunter's aim had ta'en a hurt," and marked how "the big round tears Coursed one another down his innocent nose In piteous chase." He saw the hare, "poor Wat, far off upon a hill, Stand on his hinder legs with listening ear, To hearken if his foes pursue him still," and he speaks with sorrowful pity of the "dew-bedabbled wretch," who was so sorely bested.

By the time William Shakespeare was ten years old he had three brothers and a sister for playfellows in his Henley Street home. But the old easy comfort of the house was changing. The father's business had declined and he was harassed by want of money. Debts began to accumulate,

and the whisper went round the town that the once prosperous tradesman was in serious difficulties. John Shakespeare seems to have struggled desperately to retrieve his position, but each year as it passed saw him in a more hopeless case. Of the two farms owned by his wife one was mortgaged in 1578, the other sold in 1579. Out of this business arose a vexatious lawsuit, which helped to make him still poorer. In 1585 a distraint was ordered upon his goods, which resulted in a declaration that he possessed no goods which could be distrained upon. Next year he was deprived of his position as Alderman, because he "doth not come to hall, nor hath not done of long time." Poor John Shakespeare! Perhaps he was afraid to venture out of his own home for fear of arrest; and so, with all his other losses, his civic dignity too departed from him.

Long before this time—in 1577 says a tradition, to which the circumstances of the case give strong support—Shakespeare had left school. He was the eldest son, and must do what he could to help the family in those evil days. How he spent the next few years we do not know. One biographer says that he "exercised his father's trade" of butcher, and adds, "but when he kill'd a calf, he would doe it in a high style and make a speech." We may perhaps infer from this that by 1577 John Shakespeare had given up, one by one, the other branches of trade which he had formerly carried on, and was now struggling to make a living as a butcher. We can imagine how uncongenial such a life must have been to his son, who, however, does not seem to have made any very determined effort to escape from it. The few slight notices we can gather of his life at this time seem to show him as an idler, seeking abroad some relief from the harshness of his home circumstances. In 1582, when he was only eighteen years old, and when his father's difficulties were at an acute stage, he married. His wife was Ann Hathaway, daughter of a husbandman of Shottery, a small hamlet separated by a few fields from the town of Stratford. Even this new responsibility does not seem to have roused Shakespeare to any great effort. How the young couple lived for the next few years it is hard to imagine. Ann Hathaway

had inherited a little money from her father, and Shakespeare, perhaps, managed to find some sort of occupation; tradition says that he became a schoolmaster. In 1583 a daughter was born to him, and in 1585 a twin son and daughter.

By this time, it would seem, the better mind of William Shakespeare was coming back to him. He had allowed himself to become disheartened by the unfavourable circumstances of his life, had drifted along without any set purpose, and had yielded easily to the temptations that came in his way. Now the resolution that had so much influence on his after career was slowly forming in his mind—the resolution to mend his father's broken fortunes, to make the name of Shakespeare respected once more in Stratford-on-Avon, to give his family a happy, prosperous home in his native place. The careless, happy-tempered lad whose good looks and frank manners had gained for him many friends in whose company it was so easy and pleasant to be idle, was soon to develop into the brave-hearted, strenuous worker, who, from the humblest beginning, rose by his own exertions to fame and fortune.

The crisis came through an incident which made Shakespeare's departure from Stratford a necessity. "He had," wrote Nicholas Rowe, his first biographer, "by a misfortune common enough to young fellows, fallen into ill company, and among them some that made a frequent practice of deer-stalking engaged him with them more than once in robbing a park that belonged to Sir Thomas Lucy, of Charlecote, near Stratford. For this he was prosecuted by that gentleman, as he thought, somewhat too severely; and, in order to revenge that ill-usage, he made a ballad upon him, and though this, probably the first essay of his poetry, be lost, yet it is said to have been so very bitter that it redoubled the prosecution against him to that degree that he was obliged to leave his business and family in Warwickshire and shelter himself in London." It has even been said that Sir Thomas Lucy caused him to be whipped. The story, probably, is not correct in all its details, but various small pieces of evidence now available seem to show that Shakespeare really was involved in a poaching affray on Sir Thomas

Lucy's ground. Six or seven years after, when he was writing *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, he recalled this incident. But all bitterness of feeling had long since passed away, and he contented himself with holding up his old enemy to the ridicule of his own and succeeding ages as the immortal Justice Shallow with the "dozen white luces in his coat."

II

By 1586 or 1587 Shakespeare, we believe, was in London, unknown and nearly penniless. One friend he had—Richard Field, a Stratford man, son of a friend of Shakespeare's father. We believe that Field did his best for his young townsman, but he could give him little help in the matter that had brought him to London. William Shakespeare must make his way for himself. Nothing daunted, he set to work. From the first he seems to have turned to the theatres as the best means of enabling him to gain a livelihood. He brought from Stratford many memories of the players who had from time to time visited the town, and of the pageants and shows which the taste of the age had caused to become common throughout the country. He had, perhaps, witnessed the historic revels at Kenilworth in 1575, for Kenilworth was only fifteen miles from Stratford, and Shakespeare's father might well have ridden over with his son on such a famous occasion. Like many other young men, he had, perhaps, dreamt of the stage as providing him with the opportunity of a glorious and triumphant career. But the road by which he approached the object of his desire was a very humble one. He seems to have hung about the doors of the theatres waiting for chance employment, for a tradition of the time tells us that he gained a meagre living by holding the horses of gentlemen who came to the play. Very soon he was noticed by the authorities of the theatre, and was "received into the company then in being, at first in a very mean rank." So says Nicholas Rowe, and there is a stage tradition that Shakespeare's first employment was that of call-boy. Whatever it was he had to do, he did it well, and made himself so useful and notable, either by his suggestions

or by help given in emergencies, that he was quickly advanced. By 1594 he was a member of the Lord Chamberlain's company of players, and was of some note as an actor.

All this time—the years, be it remembered, which preceded and followed the coming of the Armada—Shakespeare was probably living poorly enough—lodging in an attic in an obscure and dirty street, dining at tavern ordinaries, put to all kinds of shifts, and suffering many hardships. But he suffered them in a gay and gallant spirit, and he turned with an eager zest to the compensations which life in Elizabethan London offered. There were the great thoroughfares of the City where on any holiday one might see some splendid pageant or gorgeous procession, and where, even on working days, there were life and colour enough to delight a poet. There were the bookstalls in St Paul's Churchyard, with their "innumerable sorts of English books and infinite fardels of printed pamphlets," and even a poor actor might sometimes spare the pence which would buy one of the new-fashioned 'novellas' or a translation of some old classic. Perhaps it was at one of these bookstalls that Shakespeare bought the copy of Holinshed's *Chronicle*, and of Plutarch's *Lives*, which we think he certainly possessed. In the audiences that gathered at the theatres, too, he must have found much that both interested and delighted him. All classes of society were represented, from the splendid Court gallant who sat upon the stage to the pickpocket who quietly plied his trade among the crowd of poor and ragged citizens that pushed and struggled for standing-room in the pit—a large space, without flooring or seats, in the middle of the theatre. For companions Shakespeare had his fellow-actors, with several of whom he formed lifelong friendships.

We do not know what relations existed between Shakespeare and the University Wits. He did not, it would seem, join in their riotous living, but he probably met them in the theatres and the taverns of the town. It is abundantly evident that he felt a real admiration for Marlowe, and strove, in his early works, to copy his great predecessor, whom he looked upon as his master in dramatic art; but we

have no conclusive evidence that in the seven years during which they were both living and working in London the two poets ever met. Robert Greene, we know, was bitterly jealous of Shakespeare. In the *Groatsworth of Wit* Greene says, "There is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tyger's heart wrappt in a players hide* supposes he is as well able to bumbast out a blanke verse as the best of you; and being an absolute *Johannes factotum* is, in his owne conceit, the only Shakescene in a countrie."

This attack by Greene is valuable in many ways. It is a distinct reference to Shakespeare, and proves that, by 1592, he had made for himself some reputation not only as an actor, but as a playwright. The words "Tyger's heart wrappt in a players hide" are a parody of a line in the third part of *Henry VI*, and show that this play was written before 1592. The accusation that Shakespeare had taken the credit for work that really belonged to Greene and his friends points to the fact that Shakespeare began his career as a dramatist in the ordinary way- -by furbishing up old plays. In those days plays were sold outright to the managers of theatres, and, as occasion required, the staff of the theatre was employed to touch up or add to any play so as to make it more acceptable to the changing taste of the public. Shakespeare had probably been employed in this way on a play called *Henry VI*, which, on March 3, 1592, was acted at the Rose Theatre. The author of the original play we do not know. It was probably one of a large number written to minister to the patriotic feelings which were uppermost in men's minds during the years which followed England's great victory over Spain. Needy dramatists took the work of the old chroniclers, and, seizing upon likely dramatic passages, hastily turned them into rough plays which would satisfy the demand of the playgoers and fill the theatre. It is not unlikely that Greene and Marlowe, and perhaps Peele, had joined in producing the old play which Shakespeare revised.

Henry VI was received with enthusiasm. "How would it have joyed brave Talbot (the terror of the French)," wrote Nash, "to thinke that after he had lyne two hundred yeares in his Tombe, hee should triumphe againe on the Stage,

and have his bones newe embalmed with the teares of ten thousand spectators at least (at severall times) who, in the Tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding!"

Very soon afterward appeared another play, continuing the historical narrative—*The First Part of the Contention betwixt the two famous houses of York and Lancaster*; and in 1593 came still another continuation under the name of *The True Tragedie of Richard, Duke of Yorke, and the death of good King Henry the Sixt, as it was sundrie times acted by the Earl of Pembroke his servants.* All three were afterward again thoroughly revised by Shakespeare. How much of these plays, as we now have them, was written by him we do not know. Critics allot to him only a small part of *Henry VI*; of the second play it is agreed that the larger part is his; of the third, less than a half. The three plays were published, after Shakespeare's death, as the first, second, and third parts of *Henry VI.*

It is almost certain that at least in a part of the work of revision Shakespeare was helped by some other dramatist, and critics are inclined to think that this helper was Christopher Marlowe. Marlowe died June 1, 1593, possibly before the revision was completed, but some lines in the first two plays are so distinctly in his vein that it is difficult to believe he did not write them (*e.g.* 2 *Henry VI*, IV, i, 1–11).

So began the series of chronicle plays which was continued in *Richard III*, *Richard II*, *King John*, *Henry IV*, and *Henry V*, all probably written before 1599.

During this early period of dramatic authorship Shakespeare wrote also a series of light and mirthful comedies—*Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—all of which show more or less the influence of John Lyly; one tragedy—*Romeo and Juliet*—also belongs to this period.

III

All this time Shakespeare's reputation as a poet, playwright, and actor had been steadily rising. He began to be

known at the Court. Twice he acted before Elizabeth during the Christmas season, 1594. He was fortunate enough to gain the goodwill of the Earl of Southampton, one of the most magnificent of the young gallants who made the Court of Elizabeth splendid. Southampton was a munificent patron of letters, and to Shakespeare he showed not only kindness, but real friendship. The poet on his part felt a warm and affectionate attachment to his young patron. To Southampton he dedicated *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, two poems published in 1593 and 1594 respectively, and it is almost certain that the "fair friend" on whom in his *Sonnets* he lavishes such loving praise is Southampton also.

Sir Sidney Lee calculates that in the years immediately preceding 1599 Shakespeare's income was over £130—that is, about £1040 of our present money. His easier circumstances made it possible for him to pay longer and more frequent visits to Stratford-on-Avon, and to take the first steps in carrying out the purpose which, through all these years, he had kept steadily before him. John Shakespeare was in even worse difficulties than he had been at the time of his son leaving Stratford, and he and his wife shared with Shakespeare's wife and children the prosperity which the years in London had brought.

In 1596 Shakespeare's only son, Hamnet, died. This must have been a terrible blow both to Shakespeare's affections and to his ambition of founding a family in his native place. It has been conjectured that Prince Arthur in *King John* was drawn from this son, of whom otherwise we know nothing. But in spite of this loss he persevered in his intention. In 1597 he bought New Place, the largest and most important dwelling-house in Stratford, for £60, or £480 of our present money. It was in an almost ruinous condition, and for some years Shakespeare did not inhabit it, but occupied himself in restoring and beautifying the house, in building new barns, and in buying, as opportunity occurred, adjacent lands to enlarge and enrich his domain. From this time onward he spent a considerable part of each year in his native town.

Shakespeare had now passed through the early experimental stages, during which he was learning his art from the

work of other dramatists and from the actual business of the theatre. The year 1598 saw the completion of the series of historical plays ; and during the next two years Shakespeare wrote his three most perfect comedies—*Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*. It is difficult to select from this trio one play which has a special claim to consideration, but *As You Like It* perhaps illustrates more clearly than either of the others some of Shakespeare's characteristic qualities and methods, and we will therefore briefly review that. In 1590 was published a novel by Thomas Lodge, called *Rosalynde, Euphues Golden Legacy*. *Rosalynde* was to some extent founded upon an older story, *The Cook's Tale of Gamelyn*, which has been wrongly attributed to Chaucer, and included in some editions of *The Canterbury Tales*. On this novel Shakespeare founded his play of *As You Like It*, though he made many alterations, introduced several new characters, and transformed the whole tone and spirit of the earlier work. It is the finest example of Shakespeare's 'open air' comedies. In *Love's Labour's Lost* we are taken to the park of the King of Navarre, we catch sight of the royal hunting-party, and stand under the cool shade of the sycamore-trees. But the men and women we meet are of the Court, and they speak the artificial language of *Euphues* ; the wit sparkles so brilliantly below that we forget to look up and see the bright sun above. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* we spend a summer night in an enchanted wood, where " faint primrose beds " and banks of wild thyme shine under the white radiance of a magic moon. But even here, altogether delightful as the atmosphere is, there is a feeling of seclusion, and we know that we could never find our way to that forest by the light of the everyday sun. In *As You Like It* we are in the veritable Forest of Arden that Shakespeare knew and loved ; the free winds blow over us, sometimes keen and biting, but always healthful, the noonday sun shines with fullest light, the common sounds of woodland life are in our ears. Professor Sir Walter Raleigh, in a striking passage, has pointed out with what wonderful skill these effects are gained. " A minute examination of the play has given a curious result. No single bird, or

insect, or flower, is mentioned by name. The words 'flower' and 'leaf' do not occur. The trees of the forest are the oak, the hawthorn, the palm-tree, and the olive. For animals, there are the deer, one lioness, and one green and gilded snake. The season is not easy to determine; perhaps it is summer; we hear only of the biting cold and the wintry wind. 'But these are all lies,' as Rosalind would say, and the dramatic truth has been expressed by those critics who speak of 'the leafy solitudes sweet with the song of birds.' It is nothing to the outlaws that their forest is poorly furnished with stage-properties; they fleet the time carelessly in a paradise of gaiety and indolence, and there is summer in their hearts. So Shakespeare attains his end without the bathos of an allusion to the soft green grass, which must needs have been represented by the boards of the theatre." For it must be remembered that in Shakespeare's day no scenery of effects were used. "You shall have Asia of the one side, and Africke of the other," wrote Sir Philip Sidney, "and so many other under-kingdomes, that the Plaier when hee comes in must ever begin with telling where hee is, or else the tale will not be conceived. Now shall you have three Ladies walke to gather flowers, and then we must beleeve the stage to be a garden. By and by wee heare newes of shipwracke in the same place, then wee are to blame if we accept it not for a rocke; . . . while in the meantime two armies flie in, represented with foure swordes and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field." Rosalind, the heroine, takes her place among the company of girl-characters which is one of the notable glories of Shakespeare's works. Like her namesake in *Love's Labour's Lost* and like Beatrice in *Much Ado*, she is high-spirited and mischief-loving; like them, too, she has a sharp edge to her tongue, and can hold her own in a combat of wit with any opponent. But she is not quite so brilliant as these others, a shade softer, and just a trifle sweeter. She is younger and more girlish; there are touches which seem to indicate that she has not long left the 'tomboy' stage of childhood behind her. It has been suggested that Shakespeare studied his girl-heroines from his own daughter, Judith. In 1599, when, as

we believe, Shakespeare paid his first long visit to Stratford, Judith was about sixteen, a fresh, bright, country girl with a share of her father's wit, and a share of his good looks. It is quite possible that Shakespeare was captivated by the graces of his own daughter, and that Judith found in her famous father a playfellow beyond all her previous imaginings. So that Rosalind, daughter of a banished Duke, who sought her father in the French forest, may be really Judith, daughter of William Shakespeare, who, in the English forest by the river Avon, showed her father how sweet and bright and lovable a girl-heroine should be.

An additional interest is given to *As You Like It* by the probability that Shakespeare himself took the part of Adam when the play was first produced. Oldys (an early biographer of Shakespeare) says that a younger brother of the poet, who was alive after the Restoration, used in his old age to speak of how he had often come up to London to see his brother act. Naturally he was closely and eagerly questioned. "But all that could be recollected from him of his brother Will in that station was the faint, general, and almost lost ideas he had of having once seen him act a part in one of his own comedies, wherein, being to personate a decrepit old man, he wore a long beard, and appeared so weak and drooping and unable to walk, that he was forced to be supported and carried by another person to a table, at which he was seated among some company, who were eating, and one of them sung a song."

(To this period also belong *The Merchant of Venice, All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida,* and *Julius Cæsar.*)

IV

The end of the sixteenth century marks, roughly speaking, a turning-point in Shakespeare's career. He had by this time attained the object of his early ambition. He had made for himself a name and position in his native town ; he was no longer young Will Shakespeare, the idle, poaching son of the ruined butcher, but the wealthy Mr William Shakespeare,

gentleman, of New Place, who had made the name of Stratford famous even in far-off London. He had established his family honourably in the comfortable house he had bought and restored. He was able to make easy the last days of his father, who died in 1601, and to provide a home for his mother in the old house in Henley Street, until she too died, in 1608.

In London Shakespeare was admired and respected. He was a popular actor and a noted playwright. The new Globe Theatre, which had been built on the Bankside, Southwark, in 1599, was largely under his management, and he drew a considerable share of the profits which were made in it. He was high in the favour of James I, as he had been in that of Elizabeth. His life was, apparently, cheerful and sociable; his company was sought after by men of all ranks. Tradition says that he was the centre of the brilliant group that assembled at the Mermaid Tavern, Bread Street, where Sir Walter Raleigh had established a kind of club for literary men, and of which Beaumont writes in his well-known lines:

> What things have we seen
> Done at the Mermaid! heard words that have been
> So nimble, and so full of subtle flame,
> As if that every one from whom they came
> Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,
> And had resolved to live a fool the rest
> Of his dull life.

But as we pass on to the examination of the plays that Shakespeare produced in the early years of the new century all this brightness of prosperity disappears, and we are aware of a black cloud into which our poet has entered. It is not a cloud that dimmed his genius, for some of his most wonderful works were written while it overshadowed him. It is a cloud which, for a time, hid from him the bright face of heaven, and all the simple, beautiful, and joyous things in which his nature had delighted. It made the earth a dark, unhappy place, where men walked blindly, oppressed by the awful and mysterious dispensations of a terrible God. Perhaps some great sorrow of which we know nothing came to Shakespeare at this time; perhaps the change we notice in him is simply due to the necessity imposed upon a soul such as his of

entering into all the deep and dark places of human nature. He may have suffered in an attempt to consider, if not to solve, the terrible problems which present themselves to every thoughtful man and woman on the way through life. However this may be, all the plays written between 1602 and 1608 show an ever-increasing sense of the strength of the powers of evil in the world, of dark depths of sin and sorrow toward which man, thoughtlessly or blindly, advances.

The four great tragedies—*Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*—written between 1602 and 1606—give the fullest expression to the thoughts which seem to have possessed Shakespeare's mind at this period. In *King Lear*, for example, there is depicted an agony so stupendous and heartbreaking that to contemplate it calmly is almost an impossibility. Dr Johnson is among those who have acknowledged that they have shrunk in dread from reading or witnessing the play a second time, so deep and awful is the impression which the sufferings of the poor mad King have made upon them. It is illuminating to note the basis on which Shakespeare builds up this, his most heartrending tragedy. There is no fearful national convulsion, no devastating war, no deeply laid plot. The rending of natural human ties, the rejection of natural human duties—from these apparently small beginnings the great agony proceeds.

Yet we are shown the other side also. If Shakespeare makes us shudder at the realization that the utter disregard of filial obligations may tend to produce fiends such as Regan and Goneril, he uplifts us too by reminding us that the simple, loving fulfilment of a daughter's duty suffices to make a heroine. A stern sense of the compulsion laid upon a man to do the plain duty appointed for him and not evade it on any pretext, however specious, constrains Shakespeare in his creation of Lear ; but it constrains him also in his creation of Kent and Edmund and the poor faithful Fool. The cloud was thick and black, but Shakespeare never lost his faith that somewhere behind it there was still a sun in the heavens ; and soon the sun shone through the clouds, and made a glorious ending to the poet's splendid, though not unclouded day.

The last years of Shakespeare's life were spent mainly at Stratford. His wife and his daughter Judith were with him at New Place. His elder daughter, Susannah, had, in 1607, married John Hall, a somewhat famous doctor of medicine, and there was a little daughter now in their home. Friends from London came occasionally to Stratford to visit Shakespeare in his retirement. His actor friends—Richard Burbage, who had taken the part of the hero in almost all Shakespeare's tragedies, Heminge and Condell, who were his literary executors and edited the folio edition of his works after his death—these came many times. The poets Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton came at least once. In this happy retirement the great moral problems of the world ceased to oppress Shakespeare's mind. He had passed through his season of doubt and stress. He had met his difficulties bravely, not weakly shrinking from the pain that the encounter involved, or thrusting unwelcome questions aside to be dealt with at a more convenient season. He had won, through struggle, to peace.

In these last years he wrote three dramas—*The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*—which it is difficult to classify. They are comedies in that they end happily, but they have not the mirthful comedy spirit; they are full of a radiant loveliness which transfigures and etherealizes them without taking away from their warm living interest. The title of 'romance' has been given to these plays to distinguish them from the earlier comedies.

The difference between the romances and the comedies may be illustrated by a comparison of the heroine of each. Perdita, Imogen, and Miranda stand apart. There has been nothing like them in any of the previous plays. They are neither brilliant nor witty, they have none of the charming airs and graces that delight us in Shakespeare's earlier creations. They are sweet, lovable, loving girls, of an exquisite purity and rare beauty of character that, in some wonderful way, is shown in their every word and action. It is perhaps not too fanciful to see Judith Shakespeare once more as her father's model. He has learnt now that there is more in his daughter than the high spirits and the grace

which first charmed him ; he has learnt to reverence girlhood in her person, and to spend all his creative skill in doing it honour.

The last play that Shakespeare wrote was, as we suppose, *The Tempest*, and with this he crowned all his previous achievements. Dainty Ariel is the Puck of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* etherealized and glorified by the " delicate air " of the enchanted island. The whole play is, like the island, full of " sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not." In Prospero it is inevitable that we should see some shadow of the writer of the play. Shakespeare himself, one cannot help thinking, meant to signify an intention of bringing his work as a dramatist to a close when he wrote the words :

> I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my book.

This was his farewell, and though he lived some six years longer, he wrote no more. He died on April 23, 1616, at the age of fifty-two, and was buried in the chancel of Stratford Church.

VII

PARADISE LOST

MILTON is the only one among our great English poets who, consciously and with solemn purpose, prepared and educated himself for the work he was to do. As a young man he resolved that he would one day write a great poem; and thenceforth his whole life was ordered to fit him for this end. The force that worked within him was an intense moral earnestness, induced partly by his Puritan upbringing, partly by the natural gravity of his disposition. Life, as he conceived it, meant work for the glory of God and the edification of man. The reckless literary improvidence of the Elizabethans, who flung their treasures of wit and poetry on this side and that, was impossible to John Milton. Not so would he spend the powers bestowed on him, but would cherish them with a careful passion, waiting through long years till they grew stronger and more disciplined, and fit for the work which in due season they were to accomplish. Not only the intellectual powers, but the whole man must be chastened and perfected; or, in Milton's own noble words, "he who would not be frustrated of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem, . . . not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities unless he have in himself the experience and practice of all that is praiseworthy."

The outward circumstances of Milton's life during childhood, youth, and early manhood were entirely favourable to the attainment of this ideal. His father was a scrivener who had prospered in his calling. So that when his son John was born, in 1608, he was living in Bread Street, which was then "wholly inhabited by rich merchants." Here, above the father's shop or office, the family lived. There were John Milton the elder, his wife, of whom we know nothing, his two

sons, John and Christopher, and his daughter Anne. The house was an ideal nursery for a poet. The father was a man of high character and culture, a skilful musician, and a composer of some note. He had many friends among musicians and men of learning, who often gathered at his house. So that although Puritan ideals of order and regularity governed the household, there was little of Puritan gloom or narrowness. The father seems from the very first to have recognized that his eldest son was not quite as other children were, and could not be made to fit in with ordinary rules, or judged by ordinary standards. The boy was treated always as one marked out and dedicated for a great work.

The early years of Milton's life were the closing years of Shakespeare's ; and in after days Milton must have thought, with a thrill of keenest interest, of the many times that the elder poet had passed before the house where he himself was growing out of infancy into boyhood. For the Mermaid Tavern was in Bread Street, and when Shakespeare came up from Stratford to London, as we believe he often did during the last peaceful years of his life, he doubtless went sometimes to join the company of wits and poets at the famous club. Mr Masson, Milton's biographer, suggests that perhaps on one of these occasions Shakespeare may have met in the street the fair-haired, beautiful little boy who was afterward to stand with him in the front rank of English poets ; and that memories of his own son, Hamnet, who had died so many years before, may have kindled within him for a moment a feeling of loving, fatherly interest. It is not impossible that such a meeting took place, and it is pleasant to think of even such a slight connexion between our two great poets.

We know very little of Milton's childhood, beyond what he himself has told us in autobiographical passages of his works. He went to St Paul's School—Dean Colet's famous foundation—and his father engaged for him also a private tutor, Thomas Young, who was " esteemed to have such an excellent way of training up youth that none in his time went beyond it." Milton showed the greatest ardour for learning, which, he says, " I seized with such eagerness that from the

twelfth year of my age I scarce ever went to bed before midnight." His father looked on, well pleased to sanction even this excessive devotion to study. He hoped to see his son a great and famous divine of the English Church, and he felt, at second hand, the fervour that inspired the boy. Books, teachers, leisure—all things that a student could desire were Milton's. There are three books that we know, by the internal evidence of his works, that he must have specially studied. First in order of importance is the Bible. The Authorized Version was published when Milton was three years old, and we may be sure that a copy of it soon made its way to the scrivener's household. Milton had that close and intimate knowledge of its language which comes only of early familiarity. Its phrases and cadences entered into his speech as its teaching entered into his life. Spenser's *Faerie Queene* was undoubtedly the chief of those "lofty fables and romances" among which, he tells us, his "young feet wandered," and its influence also is clearly seen in his work. Third on the list comes a long epic poem, *The Divine Weeks*, written in 1578 by a French Huguenot, Du Bartas. It treats of the Creation, and perhaps gave Milton some ideas for his *Paradise Lost*. It was translated into English in 1606.

In 1625, when he was sixteen years old, Milton went to Christ's College, Cambridge. Various stories are told of his university career, and it seems certain that at least once he got into serious trouble with the authorities. The offence had probably something to do with his religious opinions. The nickname, "the lady of Christ's," given him in good-natured mockery by his fellow-students, testified to the purity and perhaps to the ultra-scrupulousness of his conduct.

During the seven years that he spent at the university Milton's attitude toward the Church of England was slowly changing, and when he left, at the age of twenty-three, he had quite made up his mind that he could not enter on the career that had been planned for him. By this time Archbishop Laud had made himself supreme in the English Church and had introduced ceremonies which were highly distasteful to Milton's Puritan notions. "To the service of the Church," he says, "I was destined of a child, and in mine own

resolutions, till coming to some maturity of years, and perceiving what tyranny had invaded in the Church, that he who would take orders must subscribe slave . . . I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the sacred office of speaking, bought and begun with servitude and forswearing."

The disappointment fell heavily on the elder John Milton, but he had been to some extent prepared for it, and would in no way attempt to interfere with his son's honest convictions. Milton had by this time decided that his life-work was to be the production of a great poem. He refused to enter one of the learned professions, or, indeed, any profession at all. He wanted, he said, some years of quietness and leisure, during which he might read, think, observe, and prepare himself according to the utmost of his powers for his life-work. He felt that those powers were at present crude and immature ; that, as he expresses it in the sonnet, " On his being arrived to the age of twenty-three," he had none of the " inward ripeness . . . that some more timely happy spirits indueth."

Many fathers might have felt that, after seven years of university life, the request for more time in which to study was unreasonable. But the father of John Milton had, as has been said, a strong and understanding sympathy with his great son, and once more the way was made smooth for that son's feet. Milton felt his father's kindness deeply, and acknowledged it warmly. " For thou didst not, my father," he says, " bid me go where the broad way is open, the ready mart of exchange, where there shines the sure and golden hope of heaping up coin, . . . but desiring me rather to enrich my mind by cultivation, thou allowest me far from the noise of town, and shut up in deep retreats to wander, a happy companion by Apollo's side, through the leisured sweetness of Aonian glades."

The " deep retreat " was the little village of Horton, in Buckinghamshire, where his father, having retired with a comfortable fortune, had established himself. Though Horton was only seventeen miles from London there was, in those days, little communication with the capital. It was

a true country village; the river Colne flowed through it, and there were great stretches of meadowland and wooded slopes all around. Windsor Castle, set on a hill among its noble trees, was to be seen in the distance.

Five quiet happy years were spent at Horton, free, as far as we can tell, from any trace of care or strife. During this time Milton wrote his two delightful country poems, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, his elegy, *Lycidas*, and the masques *Arcades* and *Comus*. These, though they alone would entitle him to a high place among English poets, he counted but as small things, mere experiments in the art to which he had devoted himself. He had a "mind made and set wholly on the accomplishment of greatest things." He did not seek knowledge with the true scholar's love of knowledge as an end in itself. In the strictest sense of the word he was not a scholar. He sought only to know "that which is of use to know," which means all that would help him to write his great poem.

As the fifth year at Horton drew to a close it seems to have been decided by Milton and his father that the time had come for foreign travel to take its part in this great scheme of education, and early in 1638 Milton started on a Continental tour. He visited Paris, Nice, Genoa, Florence, Rome, and Naples. He met in familiar intercourse the most eminent men of learning in Italy; at Florence he visited Galileo; and everywhere he was praised and admired both for his personal qualities and for his poems. Hearing of the troubles in England, he resolved to cut his tour short, and he reached home in August 1639.

The time for the fulfilment of his great purpose seemed now to have come, and there are signs that he himself felt that the preparation was almost complete. "You make many inquiries as to what I am about," he had written, just before he started for the Continent, to his friend, Charles Diodati, "what am I thinking of? Why, with God's help, of immortality! Forgive the word, I only whisper it in your ear! Yes, I am pluming my wings for a flight." In 1638 we have in one of his Latin poems the first indication that he had thought of some definite subject as suitable for his great work. "I shall revive in song our native princes, and among them Arthur

moving to the fray even in the nether world." There are other indications that for some time the story of King Arthur occupied his thoughts, and that he almost decided to make it his subject.

When Milton returned from the Continent he did not go back to Horton, but settled in London, took a house in Aldersgate, and received into it the two sons of his sister Anne, John and Edward Phillips, whom he undertook to educate. Still the thought of his poem was uppermost in his mind. He felt, he says, "an inward prompting which now grows daily upon me that by labour and intent study, which I take to be my portion in this life, joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes as they should not willingly let it die." There is in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, a manuscript written by Milton in 1641. It contains a list of about a hundred subjects, jotted down, apparently from time to time, as they occurred to his mind. They are all either historical or Scriptural. The historical subjects are chosen from British history, and King Arthur appears among them. The Scriptural are taken from both the Old and the New Testament. Four are concerned with the Fall of Man, and for one of these the actual title *Paradise Lost* is used. The plan of these four is sketched out much more fully than is the case with the other subjects, some of which are merely named. It is evident that Milton now felt that he had drawn near to the great work which he had seen from afar through so many years. Yet still he did not seriously set his hand to the task, though he probably drew up many schemes and wrote out some passages that he incorporated later in his poem. In his pamphlet, *The Reason of Church Government*, 1642, he says, with regard to his literary projects: "The accomplishment of them lies not but in a power above man's to promise; but that none hath by more studious ways endeavoured, and with more unwearied spirit that none shall, that I dare almost aver of myself as far as life and free leisure will extend, and that the land had once enfranchised herself from this impertinent yoke of Prelaty under whose inquisitorial and tyrannical duncery no free and splendid wit can flourish.

Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader that for some few years yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth or the vapours of wine, like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amorist or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit which can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar to touch and purify the life of whom he pleases. To this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous acts and affairs."

This pamphlet on Church government shows that Milton was, in 1641, becoming absorbed in the great struggle that was just opening ; and for twenty years that struggle claimed all his energies. He left " a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark in a troubled sea of noises and harsh disputes." From the remote heights where he had dwelt apart, undisturbed by the ordinary cares of life, he had come down to the crowded lowland ; and where the crowd was thickest, the noise greatest, and the strife most bitter, there he was to be found during all those unquiet years. He fought hard, but he fought ineffectually, for the aloofness of his life had taught him little concerning the nature of man or of the great human forces with which he now had to do.

During this period Milton wrote pamphlet after pamphlet, most of which make painful reading for those who have idealized him as the author of *Paradise Lost.* He attacked the enemies of the Parliamentary party with unmeasured abuse. Taunts, scoffs, personal insults, spiteful railing served him for argument. He threw mud, and mud was thrown back at him ; and with it all he probably failed to influence, in the smallest degree, the course of events. When the Commonwealth was established he became Latin Secretary to the Council of State, and in that capacity was involved in the undignified and disastrous controversy with Salmasius, a scholar of Leyden University, which was, as he believed, the

final cause of his blindness. For years his eyes had been failing; by 1650 the sight of the left had gone. His doctor warned him that only perfect rest could save the other. "The choice lay before me," says Milton, "between dereliction of a supreme duty and loss of eyesight; in such a case I could not listen to the physician, not if Æsculapius himself had spoken from his sanctuary; I could not but obey that inward monitor, I know not what, that spake to me from heaven. I considered with myself that many had purchased less good with worse ill, as they who give their lives to reap only glory, and I thereupon concluded to employ the little remaining eyesight I was to enjoy in doing this, the greatest service to the common weal it was in my power to render."

In the volume of political literature which Milton was at this time writing with such fluency and fervour there were, it need scarcely be said, many great and noble passages, rich in all the graces that his splendid imagination could bestow. But these are, after all, a poor exchange for the poems he might have given us had party strife not claimed him.

In his own home Milton failed to find the peace which might have made up to him for the turbulence of his public career. He married in 1643 Mary Powell, daughter of a Royalist Oxfordshire squire. The marriage was hasty and ill-advised. There could be very little prospect of sympathy between the grave poet of thirty-five, with his great enthusiasms and absorbing projects, and the country girl of seventeen, used to the gay and stirring life of a Royalist household. Her husband's lofty austerity chilled and frightened her, the long days spent in his quiet, frugal home had neither interest not variety. Milton, on his side, found that she could not enter into his great schemes, and could not give him the intelligent, soothing companionship he had hoped to gain. At the end of the first month of married life she entreated to be allowed to pay a visit to her home, and once there refused to return. It was not until two years later, when the failure of the Royalist cause had ruined her father, and placed the whole family in danger, that she sought forgiveness and reconciliation. Milton, with the fine magnanimity of his nature, not only received her, but sheltered and protected

her relations in his own home. Of the seven years that followed this reconciliation we know little. Mary Milton died in 1652, leaving her husband with three little daughters, the oldest six years of age. In 1656 he married Catherine Woodcock, but she died fifteen months later, and he was again left alone. His father, his best and most sympathetic friend, had died in 1646.

In 1660 came the Restoration, and with it the end of Milton's political career. For a time he was in danger of imprisonment, and was actually in the custody of the serjeant-at-arms. He suffered heavy money losses, including £2000 he had placed in Government securities under the Commonwealth. But he was not held to be of sufficient importance for the new Government to concern itself greatly about him, and he was left in peace.

The long interval of twenty years was over; the battle was finished, the champion had retired, unsubdued but inglorious, from the field. Milton was free once more to follow the vision of his earlier days, which for so long had been hidden by the smoke and dust of the conflict. He must have looked back, as these thoughts passed through his mind, to the time which seemed so long ago, when he had just returned from the Continent, young, hopeful, ardent, with all the powers of body and mind of the finest and most perfect temper. And then he must have thought sadly of his present self in the dark year of 1660—prematurely old, blind, and worn with strenuous living; impoverished, though not actually poor, neglected and little thought of, owing his safety to the contemptuous toleration of his political opponents. But the bitterest element in his suffering must have been the realization that, after all, the evil had triumphed over the good, the saints of the earth had been overthrown by the men of Belial. For this was what the Restoration meant to John Milton; the cause with which he had so long identified himself, he held, with all his heart and soul, to be the cause of God.

If he had sat down in inaction, pleading that he had fought a good fight, offering, as the fulfilment of his youthful pledge, the work that he had done for his country and his religion, we might have been inclined to admit the justice of his plea.

But he did not do this. At the age of fifty-two he began the great work of his life. His powers were as great as they had ever been, and were chastened and matured by the experiences of his life.

Milton's first idea had been to put his great work in the form of a drama, after the model of the "lofty grave tragedians of Greece." But as years brought maturity of judgment a truer instinct led him to the epic. So soon as his short imprisonment was over, and he had settled down in a small house at Holborn, the few fragments of his work which had been previously written were brought out and reviewed, and work was begun in earnest. And now Milton felt, to the fullest extent, how terrible was the darkness that had fallen upon him. He could not work as he would, his genius must wait upon the pleasure of others; and he had no one near him to give the effectual, ready help that his infirmity claimed. Hired helpers failed through lack of education and intelligent sympathy. His daughters, now growing up to an age at which they might be useful, should have been his loving, willing assistants. But they seem to have had little love for their father, and no interest in this work. This was, it cannot be doubted, partly Milton's own fault. His views concerning the nature and position of women he has set forth in detail in some of his prose works; they were, he asserted, naturally inferior to man in all respects, and were created to minister to him and live in subjection to his will. These theories he had carried out in the upbringing of his daughters, and the evil results were now to be seen. The help he exacted from them was given in a grudging and sullen spirit. They had received but little education, and Milton had refused to have them taught any language but their own. One tongue, he said scornfully, was enough for a woman. Yet when his blindness made a reader necessary to him he was at pains to teach them the pronunciation of five or six languages, in which they were compelled to read to him, without having any notion of the sense. It is perhaps little wonder that they rebelled. They did more. Milton's house was mismanaged, his money wasted, his servants encouraged to deceive him. A thousand petty miseries vexed

John Milton — Pieter van der Plaas

John Bunyan — Thomas Sadler

Photos W. A. Mansell and Co.

and distracted his soul, and prevented him from " beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies." He had, indeed, " fallen on evil days . . . in darkness . . . and solitude." Yet, through all, the great work went on. Outside his own home he found friends and helpers. He seems, indeed, to have had a special attraction for young and able men with scholarly tastes. " He had daily about him," we are told by his nephew, Edward Phillips, " one or other to read to him ; some persons of man's estate, who of their own accord greedily catch'd at the opportunity of being his reader, that they might as well reap the benefit of what they read to him, as oblige him by the benefit of their reading ; others of younger years sent by their parents to the same end." These bear witness to the charm of his conversation and the winning cheerfulness of his manner, qualities which his home relations failed to bring out. Milton was unfortunate in this, that his complete absorption in ideas and theories stood between him and the ordinary, everyday interests of life, so that he too often appeared harsh and unloving when he was only preoccupied.

After three years of hard and sometimes distressful labour *Paradise Lost* was finished, saving only the repolishing and revision. Milton wrote, as he believed, under the direct inspiration of the Muse:

> My celestial patroness, who deigns
> Her nightly visitation unimplored,
> And dictates to me slumb'ring, or inspires
> Easy my unpremeditated verse.

Of the poem it is praise enough to say that it is worthy of the long preparation, the pains and toil and weary waiting which went to its making. We regret the long years that Milton spent in political controversy, yet they too helped to give glory to this crowning achievement. The depth and passion of *Paradise Lost* would have been unattainable to the untried student who knew sin and sorrow only as far-off evils that had not entered into his carefully cherished and sequestered life. The vastness of the conception needed mature powers for its working out. Its scene is the universe,

its characters include not men alone, but devils, angels—even God Himself.

Heaven he pictures as the " pure empyrean, high throned above all highth, infinitely extended," and walled with a crystal wall, with towers and battlements. A gate in this wall opens on to Chaos:

> A dark
> Illimitable ocean, without bound,
> Without dimension, where length, breadth and highth,
> And time and place, are lost ; where eldest Night
> And Chaos, ancestors of Nature, hold
> Eternal anarchy, amidst the noise
> Of endless wars, and by confusion stand :
> For Hot, Cold, Moist, and Dry, four champions fierce,
> Strive here for mastery and to battle bring
> Their embryon atoms.

In the depths of Chaos is Hell, " the house of woe and pain," with a fiery lake in the middle round which lies a dismal stretch of land " that ever burned with solid, as the lake with liquid fire," and beyond lies " a frozen continent, dark and wild, beat with perpetual storms of whirlwind and dire hail." Our universe God shaped out of Chaos. In six days He finshed the work of creation, then fastened His new-made world safely by a golden chain to heaven. He made also a staircase, " ascending by degrees magnificent up to the wall of heav'n," and at the top placed " a kingly palace gate, with frontispiece of diamond and gold embellished."

The hero, if so he may be called, of the epic is Satan, and nowhere has Milton shown more nobility and largeness of conception than in his presentment of this chief of the fallen angels. The devil of medieval legend, grotesque and horrible, has disappeared. In his place comes one who

> Above the rest
> In shape and gesture proudly eminent,
> Stood like a tow'r ; his form had not yet lost
> All her original brightness, nor appeared
> Less than Arch-angel ruined, and th'excess
> Of glory obscured. . . .
> But his face
> Deep scars of thunder had intrenched, and care
> Sat on his faded cheek, but under brows

Of dauntless courage, and considerate pride
Waiting revenge : cruel his eye, but cast
Signs of remorse and passion to behold
The fellows of his crime. . . .
He now prepared to speak. . . .
Thrice he assayed, and thrice in spite of scorn,
Tears, such as angels weep, burst forth.

Soon after *Paradise Lost* was finished Milton married for the third time, probably mainly for the purpose of securing for himself domestic comfort. His third wife seems to have been a kindly, capable woman who managed his household well, and shielded him from the petty annoyances which before had disturbed him. Under these happier circumstances the revision of *Paradise Lost* went on, and was completed by 1665. Then came the dreadful plague year, followed by the year of the Great Fire, which delayed the publication until the autumn of 1667. Milton was paid £5 down and was to receive an additional £5 for each edition disposed of. He received in his lifetime the payment for the first edition, making £10 in all, and after his death his wife compounded for her interest in the poem for the sum of £8. It gained at first little attention, for the spirit of the time was not in accordance with its lofty and religious tone. It has never become widely popular, though it has had in every age its band of enthusiasts. Milton's aspiration that he might find " fit audience, though few," has been fulfilled.

The remaining years of the poet's life were calm and peaceful. In 1663 he had removed to a house situated in what is now known as Bunhill Row, and here he lived until his death, eleven years later. His daughters, who still formed an element of discord in his home, were sent out, about 1668, to learn the art of gold and silver embroidery, in order that they might be able to support themselves. His wife attended faithfully to his material wants, and he had devoted friends, chief among them the young Quaker, Thomas Ellwood, who gave him ready help. Two other great poems he produced during those quiet years, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. His life was simple and regular. He had renounced his old habit of sitting up far

into the night, though now, alas, the night and the day held for him little difference. He went to bed at nine, and rose at four in summer and five in winter. Sometimes a long wakeful night was spent in an effort at composition, and yet in the morning, not a single line was forthcoming for dictation to the amanuensis. At other times he composed readily, and next day poured out long passages which his brain had fashioned during the night hours. Sometimes verses came to him as he walked in his garden, or sat "contemplating" in his study. The morning was given to his work, the afternoon to exercise and recreation. In the evening from six to eight he received his friends, and recreated his mind with conversation. His old taste for music and his skill as a performer remained to him, and he was accustomed to play both on the organ and the bass viol. So his days passed away. Visitors have told how they found him sitting in the sunshine at the door of his house, clad in a "grey, coarse, cloth coat," his hands, swollen with gout, resting on his knees, his eyes shining "with an unclouded light, just like the eyes of one whose vision is perfect." He grew gradually weaker, and on November 8, 1674, just a month before his sixty-sixth birthday, he died, "with so little pain that the time of his expiring was not perceived by those in the room."

VIII

THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

WHEN Milton in 1667 published his *Paradise Lost* he probably believed himself to be the last prophet of a fallen cause, and as such he appeared to the small company of cultured Puritans—remnant of a great party—that gathered round him during his later years. A new literature was growing up—the brilliant, witty, dissolute literature of the Restoration. Dryden and Wycherley were at work on their licentious comedies, and a crowd of courtly writers—Waller, Roscommon, Sedley, and Rochester—were writing verses whose lightness and grace could not, to those who remembered the solemn music of *Paradise Lost* and the sober loveliness of *Comus*, atone for an utter lack of lofty or serious purpose. They looked around and saw no one who could be the Elisha to the great prophet they revered, and receive the mantle of inspiration which was soon to fall from his shoulders.

Yet the man destined to be Milton's successor as the prophet of religion was, at that very time, almost ready to take up his great work. He was one whom Milton would probably have been loth to acknowledge as a fellow-worker, for he belonged to the "common people," the "miscellaneous rabble," that the poet of *Paradise Lost* regarded with lofty contempt. His name was John Bunyan, and he came, as he tells us, "of a low and inconsiderable generation," his father's house "being of that rank that is meanest and most despised of all the families in the land." During the five years of studious retirement which Milton spent at Horton John Bunyan, some miles away, was growing up in the home of his father, the poor tinker of Elstow. The lives of these two representative Puritans present, indeed, in almost every particular the most complete contrast. In place of Milton's

early devotion to learning we have Bunyan's confession that although " notwithstanding the meanness and inconsiderableness of my parents, it pleased God to put it into their hearts to put me to school, to learn me both to read and write ; the which I also attained according to the rate of other men's children," yet " to my shame I confess I did soon lose that little I learned, even almost utterly." At an age when Milton was still a student at Cambridge Bunyan had served for a year in the Parliamentary army, had married, was the father of two children, and was earning a living for his family by the exercise of his father's trade. During the latter years of the Commonwealth he added to these labours the work of a preacher of the Baptist community ; and the Restoration, which drove Milton into retirement, placed John Bunyan in jail, as an offender against the newly revived Act of Uniformity. In jail he remained for twelve years, until the Declaration of Indulgence issued by Charles II released him in 1672. He took up his work as a preacher once more, and during the years which saw Milton's decline and death, his fame increased so that he became known as the greatest living Protestant preacher. In 1675 he was again imprisoned, and while in jail he began his great work, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He was released early in 1676, and left unmolested in his work, until his death in 1688.

The mental and spiritual development of these two great men shows an even greater contrast than their outward circumstances. The nature of John Milton expanded freely and naturally, as a flower opens under favourable influences of sunshine and fresh air. But John Bunyan reached the maturity of his powers through agony and striving, with the bursting of strong chains, with hard blows that wounded the man while they broke his fetters. The conviction of sin worked in him so strongly that when he was only nine or ten years old he believed that he " had few equals " for cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the holy name of God. " Yea, so settled and rooted was I in these things, that they became as a second nature to me ; the which, as I have also with soberness considered since, did so offend the Lord, that

even in my childhood he did scare and affrighten me with fearful dreams, and did terrify me with fearful visions. For often, after I had spent this and the other day in sin, I have in my bed been greatly afflicted, while asleep, with the apprehensions of devils and wicked spirits, who, still as I then thought, laboured to draw me away with them, of which I could never be rid."

We are quite sure, from the records of Bunyan's life and from the instances that he gives us of specific offences, that he took the very darkest view of his own spiritual condition, and that what appeared to him as terrible sin was often nothing more than the natural thoughtlessness and high spirits of youth. But he spoke according to his convictions, and the agony that he suffered was as real as if it had followed the blackest crime. All through his childhood his torments continued, but as he grew older " those terrible dreams did leave me, which also I soon forgot ; for my pleasures did quickly cut off the remembrance of them as if they had never been, . . . so that until I came to the state of marriage, I was the very ringleader of all the youth that kept me company, in all manner of vice and ungodliness." With marriage came a change of life. " My mercy," says Bunyan, " was to light upon a wife whose father was counted godly. This woman and I, though we came together as poor as poor might be, not having so much household stuff as a dish or spoon between us both, yet this she had for her part, *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* and *The Practice of Piety*, which her father had left her when he died." In these she read with her husband, helping him to recover the lost knowledge of his schooldays, and holding up before him the example of her father, who had lived " a strict and holy life both in words and deeds." " Wherefore these books, with the relation, though they did not reach my heart to awaken it about my sad and sinful state, yet they did beget within me some desires to reform my vicious life and fall in very eagerly with the religion of the times, to wit, to go to church twice a day, and that too with the foremost." From this merely formal religion he was soon driven. One day the sermon at church dealt with Sabbath-breaking, in which matter Bunyan

was a great offender. A conviction of guilt came upon him, " but behold it lasted not, for before I had well dined, the trouble began to go off my mind, and my heart returned to its old course." " But the same day," he goes on, " as I was in the midst of a game of cat, and having struck it one blow from the hole, just as I was about to strike it a second time, a voice did suddenly dart from heaven into my soul, which said, 'Will thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell?' At this I was put to an exceeding maze ; wherefore, leaving my bat upon the ground, I looked up to heaven, and was as if I had with the eyes of my understanding seen the Lord Jesus looking down upon me, as being very hotly displeased with me, and as if he did severely threaten me with some grievous punishment for these and other ungodly practices." Conviction of sin was thus reawakened, and for years Bunyan was tormented with fear of God's wrath and of hell fire. Sometimes a little comfort came to him and he was able to lay hold on the promises of Holy Scripture ; then again despair overwhelmed him and he felt that he was lost. One by one he gave up the sinful practices that he believed were keeping him from God—swearing, to which he tells us he was inordinately given ; ringing the church bells, which seemed to him so great a sin that the thought that the steeple might fall upon him in punishment " did so continually shake my mind that I durst not stand at the steeple-door any longer, but was forced to flee " ; and dancing, " I was full a year before I could quite leave that." Still he came no nearer to finding peace. " I was tossed between the devil and my own ignorance, and so perplexed, especially at some times, that I could not tell what to do." " Thus I continued for a time all on flame to be converted to Jesus Christ." " I was more loathsome in mine own eyes than a toad, and I thought I was so in God's eyes too."

At last, with many falls, and groans of agony, and fresh beginnings, he came to a place of peace. " But because my former frights and anguish were very sore and deep, therefore it oft befell me still as it befalleth those that have been scared

with fire. I thought every voice was Fire, Fire, every little touch would hurt my tender conscience."

The worst part of the spiritual conflict was over, but there was other discipline for John Bunyan before his faith could be perfected. He became a preacher, and was "indicted for an upholder and maintainer of unlawful assemblies and conventicles, and for not conforming to the national worship of the Church of England." For this "being delivered up to the jailer's hand, I was had home to prison, and there have lain now complete for twelve years." Here he found a great increase of spiritual content, and joy in the things of religion. "But notwithstanding these helps I found myself a man encompassed with infirmities; the parting with my wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place as pulling the flesh from the bones, and that not only because I am somewhat too fond of these great mercies, but also because I would have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries and wants that my poor family were like to meet with should I be taken from them." During this imprisonment Bunyan wrote three books, *Profitable Meditations*, a verse dialogue; *The Holy City*, which originated in a sermon which he preached to the other inmates of the jail one Sunday morning; and *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, the famous autobiography from which the quotations given in this chapter have been taken.

During his second imprisonment Bunyan began to write his book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Here again we note a great difference between the manner in which his work was evolved and the long thought and careful preparation which went to the making of *Paradise Lost*. His own words, though put into verse which has in itself little merit, give a more lively and realistic account of the way in which the book originated than any commentator can hope to put together.

When at first I took my pen in hand
Thus for to write, I did not understand
That I at all should make a little book
In such a mode: nay, I had undertook
To make another, which, when almost done,
Before I was aware, I this begun.

And thus it was: I, writing of the way
And race of saints in this our gospel-day,
Fell suddenly into an allegory
About their journey and the way to glory,
In more than twenty things which I set down.
This done, I twenty more had in my crown;
And they again began to multiply,
Like sparks that from the coals of fire do fly.
Nay then, thought I, if that you breed so fast,
I'll put you by yourselves, lest you at last
Should prove *ad infinitum*, and eat out
The book that I already am about.
Well, so I did; but yet I did not think
To show to all the world my pen and ink
In such a mode; I only thought to make
I knew not what: nor did I undertake
Thereby to please my neighbour; no, not I;
I did it my own self to gratify. . . .

Well when I had thus put mine ends together,
I showed them others that I might see whether
They would condemn them, or them justify;
And some said, Let them live; some, Let them die:
Some said, John, print it; others said, Not so:
Some said it might do good; others said, No.

Now was I in a strait, and did not see
Which was the best thing to be done by me:
At last I thought, Since ye are thus divided,
I print it will; and so the case decided.
For, thought I, some I see would have it done,
Though others in that channel do not run:
To prove, then, who advised for the best,
Thus I thought fit to put it to the test.

The test showed that Bunyan had done right in publishing his work. It is computed that one hundred thousand copies were sold in Bunyan's own lifetime. Nor was its literary influence confined to his own country. Three years after its publication it was reprinted by the Puritan colony in America, there receiving, as Bunyan himself tells us, "much loving countenance." And there it has continued ever since, in an untold number of editions; and, with Shakespeare, it forms part of the literary bond which unites the two English-speaking peoples on each side of the Atlantic. It

was translated into Dutch, French, and German, and these editions also were sold in large numbers.

The Pilgrim's Progress is written "in the similitude of a dream." "As I walked through the wilderness of this world," it begins, "I lighted on a certain place where was a den, and laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept, I dreamed a dream." The dream showed the passage of a man whose name was Christian, from the City of Destruction, along the narrow way and through the Valley of Humiliation and the Valley of the Shadow of Death to the Celestial City. All the difficulties which beset a man in his efforts to find salvation, the difficulties with which Bunyan himself had so manfully wrestled, are shown under the form of an allegory. Spenser had dealt with a similar subject, and had treated it allegorically; but *The Pilgrim's Progress* bears little likeness to *The Faerie Queene.* Its meaning is plain and unencumbered, and is consistent throughout; there is no shifting of the ground or confusing of the issues. Its scene, like that of *Paradise Lost,* includes earth, heaven, and hell. But Bunyan does not attempt to frame a complete plan of the universe, or to transport his readers to vast illimitable regions such as give grandeur to the action of Milton's poem. His scenes are the common scenes of earth—mountains and valleys, rivers, precipices, miry roads, gardens, and houses: each of these has a spiritual significance which is made clear in perfectly plain and definite fashion by the name which is given to it—the Slough of Despond, the Valley of Humiliation, the Delectable Mountains. His characters are labelled in the same way, so that when Obstinate, Pliable, Mr Worldly Wiseman, Mr Talkative, or Mr Greatheart makes his appearance the reader knows at once how he is going to behave, and the nature of the part he will take in the action. Yet the names are so aptly fitted, the scenes and characters are introduced so naturally, the personified virtues and vices are so exactly like the ordinary men that one meets every day in real life, that the reader is never either irritated or bored, but is interested in the story as a story, although the moral is writ so large that one might well imagine it would allow no attention to be given to anything but itself.

The world as Bunyan sees it in his dream is a town called the City of Destruction, which stands in the midst of a wide plain. Heaven is the Celestial City, built upon a mighty hill in the country of Beulah, whose air is very sweet and pleasant, where the birds sing continually and every day the flowers appear on the earth and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land. Its foundations are higher than the clouds, it is builded of pearls and precious stones, also the streets thereof are paved with gold. Before it flows the dark river of Death, and there is no bridge to go over and it is very deep. Hell lies between Heaven and Earth, in the Valley of the Shadow of Death ; its mouth stands hard by the wayside, and ever and anon flame and smoke come out in abundance with sparks and hideous noises.

Perhaps the most remarkable and significant instance of the difference between the methods of Bunyan and Milton is their presentation of the devil. Milton's Satan we have seen; here is Bunyan's. Apollyon, the "foul fiend," was hideous to behold : "He was clothed with scales like a fish (and they are his pride), he had wings like a dragon, and feet like a bear, and out of his belly came fire and smoke, and his mouth was as the mouth of a lion." He fought with Christian in the Valley of Humiliation, and the sore combat lasted for above half a day. "In this combat no man can imagine unless he had seen and heard, as I did," says the dreamer, "what yelling and hideous roaring Apollyon made all the time of the fight ; he spake like a dragon. It was the dreadfullest sight that ever I saw." Apollyon, when he was vanquished, "spread forth his dragon wings and sped him away, that Christian for a season saw him no more."

This, as we call it now, is the vulgar conception of the devil ; most of us have outgrown the belief which Bunyan held so fervently. To him Apollyon was a real being ; he himself, in his earlier days, had dreaded that the fiend might come in just such a form and carry him off. To Bunyan Milton's Satan would have been unintelligible. He had not the sublimity of imagination which could dispense with outward and visible signs, and see in the careworn, dignified, and only less than noble figure that Milton presents, a more

awful being than the most terrifying monster with horns and hoofs. Yet Bunyan possessed two qualities that Milton lacked, and these gave him a hold upon the hearts of common men, so that where Milton has one reader, Bunyan counts his by hundreds. He had, in the largest degree, that hearty human sympathy which was so conspicuously wanting in the other ; and he had besides, though it was often obscured by his intense earnestness, the gift of humour. He drew men to him by the force of his personal qualities. "In countenance," one of his friends tells us, "he appeared to be of a stern and rough temper, but in his conversation mild and affable ; not given to loquacity or to much discourse in company unless some urgent occasion required it : observing never to boast of himself or his parts but rather to seem low in his own eyes, and submit himself to the judgment of others ; abhorring lying and swearing, being just, in all that lay in his power, to his word ; not seeming to revenge injuries, loving to reconcile differences and make friendships with all. He had a sharp quick eye, with an excellent discerning of persons, being of good judgment and quick wit."

For twelve years after he was released from his second imprisonment Bunyan lived peaceably and quietly in Bedford. The success of the first part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* had shown him his power as a writer and encouraged him to go on with this branch of his work. He revised Part I of his book, and made some notable additions to it. In 1680 he published *The Life and Death of Mr Badman,* which forms a kind of companion picture to *The Pilgrim's Progress,* describing the downward career of a man wholly given over to evil. In 1682 was published Bunyan's second great allegory, *The Holy City.* In 1684 appeared the second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress.* It describes the journey of Christian's wife, and her four children, to the Celestial City, and is very far inferior, both in interest and in style, to the first part.

Bunyan died in 1688, a few months before the Prince of Orange landed in England. He had ridden from Bedford to Reading on one of the errands of mediation which were common to his later years, and for which his peace-loving nature and the great weight which men of his own religious

community attached to his opinion, made him especially fitted. He was riding home, by way of London, when a storm came on, and before he could find shelter he was wet through. He was in a weak state of health, the result of an attack of the ' sweating sickness ' from which he had suffered in the previous year, and the chill which he sustained through this unfortunate accident brought on a fever. He reached the house of one of his London friends, and there, ten days later, he died. He was buried in the famous burying-ground of the Dissenters at Bunhill Fields.

Bunyan left behind him, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a unique monument. The book can be read with interest and delight by children, by the unlearned and ignorant, by cultured men of the world, and by great scholars. It is a religious work, written in an age that was bitterly controversial, yet there is in it no bitterness and no controversy; Nonconformists and Anglicans alike can read it without disagreement. It was written by a man who was almost entirely without education, whose library had consisted of the Bible, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, and a few popular religious treatises; and it challenges comparison with two of the greatest works in English literature—Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*—written by men who were both scholars and great literary artists. Yet the comparison shows that, as a religious work, it has had far greater influence than *Paradise Lost*, and, as an allegory, it is far nearer perfection than is the *Faerie Queene*.

IX

THE TATLER: THE SPECTATOR

ON the 12th of April, 1709, the numerous coffee-houses of Queen Anne's London were stirred by a small thrill of pleasant excitement. Copies of a new periodical, with the inviting and suggestive name of *The Tatler*, had that morning been distributed among them. The man of fashion had found one on his table at White's coffee-house when he sauntered in late in the afternoon for his cup of chocolate, and had noted with languid approbation that the paper promised "accounts of Gallantry and Pleasure." At Will's the wits were making merry over the new paper. They commended highly the editor's choice of a pseudonym, for he appeared before his readers as Isaac Bickerstaff. The name was familiar to the whole town, since, about a year before, Jonathan Swift had used it in an attack on the almanack-makers who pretended to predict the events of the coming year. He had written a pamphlet in which he had gravely foretold the death of the most noted among them, Partridge by name, at eleven P.M. on March 29; and when that date had passed he had insisted, in spite of angry protests from Partridge, that the man really was dead—could not, in fact, by the laws of logic and reason, be alive. All the wits of the day had joined in keeping up the joke, and the town was kept in uproarious laughter for months. It had scarcely died away when *The Tatler* appeared with the name of the then famous astrologer on its title-page.

At the Grecian coffee-house lawyers and Templars wondered how far the promised articles on learning and literature would deserve serious attention. At Child's such of the clergy as were not so entirely given over to politics as to have forgotten their proper duties welcomed the announcement that the new paper would be on the side of

morality. At Jonathan's and the less important coffee-houses of the capital merchants and citizens speculated as to the probable reliability of the domestic and foreign news. The announcement that the paper was designed to supply reading for the fair sex caused much amusement, and men went home to joke with their wives and daughters about the new means of entertainment offered to them. But to the thoughtful among all classes there was in the editor's address one sentence of special interest. "The general purpose of this Paper," said Isaac Bickerstaff, "is to expose the false arts of life, to pull off the disguises of cunning, vanity and affectation, and to recommend a general simplicity in our dress, our discourse, and our behaviour."

It was for the means of doing these things that the society of the day had for some time been vaguely seeking. The profligacy that had marked the Court of Charles II had, under the rule of William III and Queen Anne, passed into something more resembling decency of behaviour; but though men had grown somewhat ashamed of the excesses their fathers had practised, they had not learned to adapt their speech and manners to a much higher standard. Sobriety and decorum were still looked upon as the badge of a despised Puritanism, and fine gentlemen still drank, and swore, and diced, and made love to their neighbours' wives, not so much because they enjoyed doing so as because their reputations depended on their proficiency in these arts. Dress was still extravagant, and the fashions of the day in many cases ridiculous and unsightly. Men took their pleasures coarsely, and women had little to occupy them except frivolity.

The great mass of the middle class—the city merchants and small country squires — though they had been but slightly affected by the licentiousness of Court life, had suffered from the lack of inspiring examples and the general lowering of the standard of manners and conduct. It was this class, now grown rich and important and ambitious, that felt most acutely its need of an ideal that would direct and enlighten its blundering efforts toward gentler manners, purer pleasures, more refined social intercourse, a more

humane and kindly spirit in the business of life. *The Tatler* promised to do this; and if to us it seems absurd that a penny newspaper, published three times a week, should set out to effect what was little less than a complete revolution in manners and morals, we must remember the difference between those times and our own. The Press to-day works as a great whole, and no one paper can be said to exert a very marked influence; but, taken collectively, the effect of our periodical literature is enormous. In the days of *The Tatler* only a few comparatively feeble efforts had been made to use the great and powerful instrument which is now in such active operation, but these had revealed the fact that a mighty force was there only waiting for a skilled hand to make it effective. Add to this a public ready and eager to be influenced, and the highest hopes will not seem unjustifiable.

So thought Richard Steele, the man to whom *The Tatler* owed its existence. With a true instinct he had seized the right moment and the right means for the work he wished to do. He was no faultless hero or calm philosopher who, looking down on society from a serene height, formulated a plan for its regeneration. He was an impulsive, kind-hearted, reckless, improvident, lovable Irishman, whose fine impulses and lofty aspirations were continually being brought to naught by a pleasure-loving disposition and a lack of stern moral fibre. He had been educated at the Charterhouse and at Oxford, had left the University with discredit and enlisted as a trooper in the Guards. For this his father, a prosperous Irish attorney, had disinherited him. Steele remained in the army until he rose to the rank of captain, and made himself a noted figure among the wild gallants of the town. He lived extravagantly, was always in debt; he drank, and diced, and brawled in the taverns and coffee-houses. But he never lost his keen appreciation of all that was lofty and beautiful in human life, and he loved the ideal which he always saw shining in the distance before him, though he never gathered up his strength in a real attempt to approach it. So, in the midst of his dissipations, he astonished the town by producing a little book called *The Christian*

Hero, in which he tried to show that through the teaching of Christianity alone could man become a true hero and a true gentleman. It is a sincere and manly little book, full of the loftiest moral and religious sentiments; yet we cannot wonder that it brought upon Steele much ridicule—his theory and his practice were so entirely opposed the one to the other. Nothing daunted, he turned to another department of literature, and tried to reform the notoriously licentious drama by writing three comedies in which virtue instead of vice should be interesting and triumphant. He was not without power as a dramatist, but he allowed his moral purpose to overweight his story, and he replaced the brilliant wit of the Restoration comedy by an excessive sentimentality which tended to become insipid. So he gained little fame from his work for the theatre, though he gained some money, and that to impecunious, thriftless Dick Steele was a matter of considerable importance. But by 1708 all this money had gone, as well as the money which two successive marriages with rich heiresses had brought him. He was glad indeed to accept the post of gazetteer, or editor of the official news-sheet, *The London Gazette*, which was under the control of the Government, at a salary of two hundred and fifty pounds a year. It was this position which first suggested to him the idea of *The Tatler*. He had, through his position as gazetteer, almost a monopoly of official news, domestic and foreign, and it seemed to him that with this advantage he could produce a newspaper that would sell well, and so bring relief to his extremely distressed finances. It would also, he hoped, give him an opportunity of bringing forward, in a form in which they would reach just the class they were designed to benefit, those views on moral and social questions that were so dear to his heart. So with a sanguine spirit he started his work. From the first he addressed himself especially to the frequenters of the coffee-houses, for his knowledge of London life taught him that these really formed the centres of public opinion. In his first number he wrote: "All accounts of Gallantry, Pleasure, and Entertainment, shall be under the article of White's Chocolate-House; Poetry under that of Will's Coffee-House; Learning

under the title of Grecian ; Foreign and Domestic News you will have from Saint James's Coffee-House ; and what else I have to offer on any other subject shall be dated from my own apartment."

For a short time the original plan of *The Tatler* was adhered to with a fair degree of consistency ; but soon the natural bent of the editor's mind began to influence and modify it. Less stress was laid upon news, and more upon the comments and reflections which it suggested, and the essays, originally only an unimportant element in the whole, became the leading feature. Steele, in the character of the old astrologer, discoursed freely to his readers on the various social questions of the day. He attacked the fashionable vices of gaming and drunkenness, the practice of duelling, and the unhealthy state of public opinion which caused a man to boast of his immorality and blush to be detected in an act of piety or sober virtue. He depreciated the wit which the age prized as one of the first qualities distinguishing a gentleman. A gentleman, said Steele, is one who is thoughtful of the feelings of others and would rather miss the opportunity for a brilliant repartee than humiliate or discomfit a fellow-man ; who can hold steadfastly to his opinions without offensively thrusting them in the faces of those who think differently ; who is dignified without being self-assertive, and genial without being unduly familiar. Again and again, in successive numbers of *The Tatler*, Steele placed this ideal before his readers. He touched too, with a lighter hand, affectations of dress and manner, ridiculing "the order of the insipids," as he called the super-exquisite fine gentlemen, in merciless fashion. The fact that few of his readers knew who the editor of *The Tatler* was gave him confidence, and, as he said when the time came for him to wish them farewell, "Mr Bickerstaff was able to attack prevailing and fashionable vices with a freedom of spirit that would have lost both its beauty and efficacy had it been pretended to by Mr Steele." The character of Isaac Bickerstaff was developed as time went on. He was represented as an aged, solitary man, who, like the astrologers of an earlier time, lived surrounded by the mysterious instruments and appliances necessary to his

art. He had a familiar spirit, named Pacolet, who was able to read men's thoughts and reveal to his master their secrets. This plan gave to Steele a wide range of subjects, for the astrologer through his own powers and those of his servant could bring all mankind under his observation ; and, in order to include womankind also in the survey, Steele, at an early stage of his venture, invented a lady editor, Jenny Distaff, half-sister to the astrologer. With her help *The Tatler* was made to extend its observations to things specially concerning women, and the articles which from time to time dealt with these were among the most interesting and characteristic to be found in the paper. At a time when women were thought of but lightly, when the false gallantry of the Restoration period had debased them in the public eye, when they were sneered at for devoting themselves to the frivolous and trifling occupations which were all that the custom of the time allowed them, Steele's chivalry was unfailing. He attempted neither gallantry nor satire ; he discussed feminine failings and virtues in the same way as he had discussed those of men, as freely, but more gently ; and his fine compliment to Lady Elizabeth Hastings is an indirect compliment to all her sex : "To love her was a liberal education."

Not many numbers of *The Tatler* had appeared before Steele's intimate friends began to suspect who Isaac Bickerstaff really was. No. 5 revealed him to Joseph Addison. The two had been at the Charterhouse School and at Oxford together. Steele, in his impulsive fashion, had early formed an enthusiastic, worshipping attachment to the boy who, though exactly his own age, was so far beyond him in gravity, self-control, and strength of purpose, as well as in scholarship. The two boys became friends, and Steele visited Addison in his home at Milston Rectory, in Wiltshire. After their college days Steele and Addison for some time saw little of each other. Addison left the University with a reputation for scholarship, especially for excellence in Latin verse. He became known to Dryden, and to other prominent men of letters. He published various translations and complimentary poems, and received in 1699, when he was twenty-seven

years old, a pension from the Crown. He travelled on the Continent, and shortly after his return he wrote, at the request of the Ministry, the poem that established his fortune. This was *The Campaign*, which celebrated Marlborough's victory at Blenheim. It was extraordinarily popular, and Addison received from the Government, as a reward, the post of Under-Secretary, and entered upon a political career.

When the first *Tatler* appeared Addison was in Ireland, where he had gone as Secretary to the Lord-Lieutenant. He was not in the secret of the new enterprise, but, as has been said, he speedily recognized Steele's hand in it. He offered to become a contributor to the paper, and his offer was very gladly accepted. The first article he sent (*The Tatler*, No. 18) dealt with the conclusion of peace negotiations with France. It is in Addison's characteristic tone of delicate and playful irony. "There is another sort of gentleman," he says, after speaking of the soldiers who would now lose their employment, "whom I am much more concerned for, and that is the ingenious fraternity of which I have the honour to be an unworthy member; I mean the news-writers of Great Britain, whether Postmen or Post-boys or by what other name or title soever dignified or distinguished. The case of these gentlemen is, I think, more hard than that of the soldiers considering that they have taken more towns, and fought more battles. They have been upon parties and skirmishes when our armies have lain still, and given the general assault to many a place when the besiegers were quiet in their trenches. They have made us masters of several strong towns many weeks before our generals could do it, and completed victories when our greatest captains have been glad to come off with a drawn battle."

The influence of the new contributor to the paper was soon very strongly felt. "I have only one gentleman," Steele said, in his preface to the collected edition of *The Tatler*, "who will be nameless, to thank for any frequent assistance to me, which indeed it would have been barbarous in him to have denied to one with whom he has lived in intimacy from

childhood, considering the great ease with which he is able to dispatch the most entertaining pieces of this nature. This good office he performed with such force of genius, humour, wit and learning, that I fared like a distressed prince who calls in a powerful neighbour to his aid ; I was undone by my own auxiliary ; when I had once called him in I could not subsist without dependence on him." But in saying this Steele undervalues his own services to the paper in order to exalt those of his friend. To Steele belongs the credit of originating the ideas which Addison developed so successfully. He had greater initiative and greater daring than his friend, and was quicker to receive impressions from the world about him. In literary workmanship, however, he could not approach Addison, whose perfection of style becomes more marvellous the more closely one examines it. His delicate playful humour is like nothing else that literature can show, and in his clear, beautifully turned sentences there is such a suggestion of refinement and finish that the reader's mind is uplifted by the sound as well as by the sense of what he writes. One cannot imagine a coarse sentiment expressed in Addisonian English.

As the literary element in the paper became more and more prominent the news element receded into the background. It is probable that both Addison and Steele felt themselves hampered by the original plan, which was still supposed to guide them in their conduct of *The Tatler*, and more especially by the political principles which had been at first ardently professed. On January 2, 1711, the last number of *The Tatler* appeared. The reason given for its discontinuance was that since the public had discovered Richard Steele in Isaac Bickerstaff the working of the paper had become ineffective.

Two months passed ; and then, on March 1, 1711, came the first number of a new paper, *The Spectator*, which Addison and Steele combined to make famous. It was published every day, and each number dealt in the form of an essay with a single subject. Isaac Bickerstaff had disappeared, and " the Spectator " was installed in his place. In the first number this gentleman introduces himself. He is, he tells his

readers, a country gentleman of good though not high birth, and of respectable though not great fortune. From his childhood he has been noted for a singular gravity of demeanour, and a taciturnity which has increased with his years. He is a scholar, and a man who has seen the world, both at home and abroad. He has lived for some years in London and has frequented all places of public resort, though he has taken no part in what he has seen going on. "I have acted," he says, "in all parts of my life as a looker-on, which is the character I intend to preserve in this paper."

This first number was written by Addison. In the second Steele described the other members of a club of which "the Spectator" was a member. The first of these is the famous Sir Roger de Coverley, a country gentleman, whose delightful simplicity of character and kindliness of heart have made him one of the best known and best loved among the heroes of fiction. There follow a gentleman of the Inner Temple whose name is not given; Sir Andrew Freeport, "a merchant of great eminence in the City of London"; Captain Sentry, "a gentleman of great courage, good understanding, but invincible modesty"; and "gallant Will Honeycomb," the elderly *beau* who is still a great man among the ladies, and can tell stories of the reigning *belles* of two generations. These, with a clergyman who is an occasional visitor, make up the club. The papers in which Mr Spectator tells of the doings of himself and his friends are among the best of the whole series. At other times he discourses upon every variety of subject—social, literary, religious, philosophical. In the tenth number he tells what are his general aims in the conduct of the paper. "My publisher tells me that there are already three thousand of them distributed every day, so that if I allow twenty readers to every paper, which I look upon as a modest computation, I may reckon about three score thousand disciples in London and Westminster, who I hope will take care to distinguish themselves from the thoughtless herd and of their ignorant and unattentive brethren. Since I have raised to myself so great an audience, I shall spare no pains to make their instruction agreeable and their diversion useful. For which reasons I shall

endeavour to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality, that my readers may, if possible, both ways find their account in the speculation of the day. It was said of Socrates that he brought philosophy down from heaven to inhabit among men; and I shall be ambitious to have it said of me that I have brought philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee-houses." He recommends, therefore, that in all well-regulated families where an hour is set apart every morning for tea and bread and butter, *The Spectator* shall be punctually served up, as part of the tea-equipage. "There are none," he goes on to say, "to whom this paper will be more useful than to the female world. I have often thought there has not been sufficient pains taken in finding out proper employments and diversions for the fair ones. Their amusements seem contrived for them, rather as they are women, than as they are reasonable creatures, and are more adapted to the sex than to the species. The toilet is their great scene of business, and the right adjusting of their hair the principal employment of their lives. The sorting of a suit of ribbons is reckoned a very good morning's work; and if they make an excursion to a mercer's or a toy-shop, so great a fatigue makes them unfit for anything else all the day after. Their more serious occupations are sewing and embroidery, and their greatest drudgery the preparation of jellies and sweetmeats. This, I say, is the state of ordinary women; though I know there are multitudes of those of a more elevated life and conversation, that move in an exalted sphere of knowledge and virtue, that join all the beauties of the mind to the ornaments of dress, and inspire a kind of awe and respect, as well as love, into their male beholders. I hope to increase the number of these by publishing this daily paper, which I shall always endeavour to make an innocent, if not an improving entertainment, and by that means at least divert the minds of my female readers from greater trifles. At the same time, as I would fain give some finishing touches to those which are already the most beautiful pieces of human nature, I shall endeavour to point out all those imperfections that

Sir Richard Steele — W. Hoel

Jonathan Swift — Charles Jervas

Joseph Addison — Sir Godfrey Kneller

Photos of 2 and 3, Emery Walker, Ltd.

are the blemishes, as well as those virtues which are the embellishments of the sex."

The means by which *The Spectator* attempted to accomplish the objects thus set forward were many and various. Great use was made of "the Club," and sometimes paper followed paper in which one or other of its members gave the Spectator his excuse for offering disquisitions on miscellaneous subjects. In the week which ended July 7, 1711, for example, five out of six of the papers were of this character. On Monday morning Addison told his readers how the Spectator visited Sir Roger de Coverley at his country house, and described the members of his household. On Tuesday Steele took up the story, and told of Sir Roger's relations with his servants—"the lower part of his family." On Wednesday Addison introduced his readers to Will Wimble, a friend of Sir Roger's, the younger son of an ancient family, who "being bred to no business and born to no estate," "has frittered away his time in trivialities, and put the real talents that he possesses to no useful purpose."

On Thursday Steele related how Sir Roger took the Spectator round his picture gallery and showed him the portraits of his ancestors, and incidentally the characteristics of a gentleman were discussed. Addison, it may be remarked, looked upon Sir Roger as his own creation, and was very jealous of his being touched by any other hand. It is not often that, as here, Steele is allowed to make the knight the subject of two almost successive papers; and after this he says no more about Sir Roger until a full year has gone by.

On Friday Addison resumed his account of Sir Roger at home, and told of a conversation between the knight and the Spectator on the subject of apparitions. It was the practice of the editors to give to their readers on Saturdays a "serious paper," that they might be put into a proper frame of mind for the observance of their religious duties on Sunday. This particular Saturday brought an essay *On Immortality*, of which the main theme was "the progress of a finite spirit to perfection." So, for one day, the history of Sir Roger was

interrupted, only to begin again on Monday with one of the most delightful of all the Coverley papers, *Sir Roger at Church.*

When, in August 1712, a Government tax was imposed upon periodicals, and the price of *The Spectator* was, in consequence, raised from a penny to twopence, it might reasonably have been feared that its circulation would suffer; but the effect was only slight and temporary. Addison wrote a paper upon the imposition of the tax in his usual inimitable style. "This is the day," he said, "on which many eminent authors will publish their last words. . . . A facetious friend of mine, who loves a pun, calls this present mortality among authors *the fall of the leaf.*"

It was in the nature of things, however, that such a paper as *The Spectator* could not go on indefinitely. Its charm consisted in its freshness and variety, in the lightness of touch which permitted it to deal with almost every department of social life. But as the enterprise grew somewhat stale to its originators, there came a perceptible falling-off in these qualities. The later numbers of *The Spectator* are more serious in tone and not so uniformly excellent in style as the earlier ones. Both editors began to think that it was time to stop, and with its 555th number, on December 6, 1712, the career of *The Spectator* was brought to an end.

The subsequent careers of Addison and Steele may be briefly told. A new paper, *The Guardian*, succeeded *The Spectator*, but failed to keep itself free from political entanglements and soon came to an end. It was followed by a violently partisan paper, *The Englishman*, edited by Steele alone, but this, too, was unsuccessful. Addison turned from periodical literature to the theatre, and in 1713 produced his tragedy, *Cato*, which was received with enthusiasm by the critics of England and of France, but has not sustained its reputation. In 1716 he married the Dowager Countess of Warwick, and henceforward gave most of his attention to politics. An unfortunate quarrel took place between him and his old friend Richard Steele, who was opposed to him in political opinions. Addison died in 1719, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Steele, by his espousal of the Hanoverian cause, won the favour of George I, was given various small offices, entered Parliament, and was knighted. He wrote one more comedy, *The Conscious Lovers*, and various political pamphlets. He died in 1729.

X

ROBINSON CRUSOE

DURING the year 1712 there was much talk in the coffee-houses and clubs of London concerning the adventures of a Scottish sailor, Alexander Selkirk, who had been put ashore by his captain on the desert island of Juan Fernandez, and had lived there for four years (1705–1709) quite alone. He had been rescued by Captain Rogers, who had brought him back to England in 1711. Reports of Selkirk's adventures at once began to circulate in London, and the story was fully told in Captain Rogers's book, *A Cruising Voyage round the World*, published in 1712. Richard Steele, with his quick, human sympathy, was one of the first to be attracted by the account. He saw, moreover, the chance of a telling article in *The Englishman*, which he was then editing. He sought out Alexander Selkirk and obtained from his mouth an account of his experiences. This appeared in the number of *The Englishman* issued December 3, 1712. *The Englishman*, we know, did not appear upon the breakfast-table of every middle-class home with the same certainty and regularity that *The Spectator* had done. Yet it reached many of them, and at these, we may be sure, the conversation turned mainly upon the surprising experiences of the lonely mariner whose story it contained. There was one house, situated in the pleasant rural village of Stoke Newington—a large, handsome dwelling-place, with stables, coach-house and beautifully kept gardens—where we may feel certain the paper made its appearance ; for its master was a keen politician and an active journalist who made it his business to hear all that was being said upon the topics of the day. We can picture him as he came downstairs on that cold December morning—a spare, elderly man, with a brown complexion, a hooked nose, a sharp chin, grey eyes,

and a large mole near his mouth. He wore the luxuriant, flowing wig with which the portraits of Addison, Steele, Swift, and other notabilities of the reign of Queen Anne have made us familiar. He was neatly and carefully dressed, and his clothes were a trifle gayer in colour and a trifle richer in material than might have been expected from a gentleman of the middle class, who was approaching the end of his fifty-third year. His movements were quick and energetic, though his hands were somewhat swollen with gout; his keen, restless glance showed an eager interest in all the circumstances of the life around him. At the breakfast-table with him sat his wife and his "three lovely daughters, who were admired for their beauty, their education and their prudent conduct"; perhaps, also, one or more of his three sons, who were, however, at this time out in the world making careers for themselves. There was much lively talk and laughter over the breakfast-table; but the master of the house managed, with it all, to find out something of the contents of the little pile of papers that lay before him. He saw at once the possibilities of the story of Alexander Selkirk, and when he rose from the breakfast-table we may imagine that he secured the paper, which had probably been going the round of the party, carried it away with him to the room upstairs where he did his work, and put it carefully away for future use. For nearly seven years it lay there undisturbed, but nevertheless it proved to be the germ of one of the most famous of the world's classics. For the spare elderly man was Daniel Defoe, and the hint which he gained from the life of Alexander Selkirk he developed into *Robinson Crusoe*.

In 1712, however, he had no time for the writing of fiction. He was a man who always had many irons in the fire, and the story of his long and strenuous career is almost bewildering by reason of the manifold activities, extraordinary vicissitudes and swift changes of front that it records. He was the son of a butcher of Cripplegate, and was designed by his parents for the Presbyterian ministry. But he disappointed their expectations, and became a hosier in Cornhill, whose business made it necessary for him to spend various periods abroad, in Spain, and probably also in Germany,

Italy, and France. He took a share in Monmouth's rebellion in 1685, and joined the army of William III in 1688. He became an enthusiastic politician, and a prominent figure of the London dissenting body. In 1692 he failed in business for seventeen thousand pounds, and four years later we find him managing a tile factory near Tilbury. He began his literary career by a satire in verse, written in 1691, and from that time forward he produced with astounding rapidity pamphlets, verse, political tracts, and journalistic matter of every description. In 1703 he was arrested for writing a tract called *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, was sentenced to stand three times in the pillory, and to be imprisoned in Newgate during the Queen's pleasure. He was released at the end of a year, and founded a newspaper called *The Review*, which dealt mainly with political topics. This paper he carried on for nine years, almost single-handed. He was employed by the Government in secret service, and served in this way five different administrations. His rides over England as an election agent for Harley in 1704 and 1705 are famous. To give any account here of his literary activity would be impossible. No public event occurred but he was ready to take advantage of it with a tract, a set of verses, a realistic narrative, or a moral discourse. The amazing fertility of his brain is demonstrated more and more fully as modern research brings to light fresh examples of his work.

Defoe's education had not been of the kind which alone was valued in the days of Queen Anne. He had received no classical training, and had never been a student of either University. He was educated at a school at Stoke Newington, kept by a famous dissenting preacher, Charles Morton. All the rest of his really remarkable store of knowledge he seems to have picked up by his own efforts in after life. The great writers of his day despised him as a low-born ignorant scribbler. "An illiterate fellow whose name I forget," is the way in which he is referred to by Swift. Defoe fiercely resented this attitude of his contemporaries. In one of his journalistic sketches he attempts to vindicate his claim to the title of scholar. "I remember," he says, "an Author in the World some years ago, who was generally upbraided with

Ignorance, and called an 'Illiterate Fellow' by some of the *Beau Monde* of the last age." Then having given in detail an account of some of the attainments of his despised Author, he sums up: "This put me wondering, ever so long ago, what this *strange Thing* called a Man of Learning *was* and what is it that constitutes a *Scholar*? For, *said I*, here's a man speaks five languages, and reads the Sixth, is a master of Astronomy, Geography, History, and abundance of other useful knowledge (which I do not mention, that you may not guess at the Man, who is too Modest to desire it), and yet, they say, *this Man is no Scholar.*"

At the time when we have imagined him reading *The Englishman*, in the house he had lately bought at Stoke Newington, he had just returned from Scotland, which he had visited in the interests of the political party that desired to secure the Hanoverian succession. He had involved himself in difficulties with the opposition party, and was in danger, as he knew, of prosecution for treason. With this hanging over his head he was still taking an active interest in the war with France and writing tracts advocating an honourable peace, was planning the issue of a new trade journal, *The Mercator*, and was busily employed in the service of the Government. It is no wonder that Alexander Selkirk had to wait for a more convenient season.

But when the treason charge had been settled by a few days' imprisonment in 1713; when the Peace of Utrecht had been signed; when the troubles of 1715 were safely over and George I securely seated on the English throne, then Defoe managed to find some spare minutes for miscellaneous writing. In 1718 accounts of a band of famous pirates, who had become a terror to mariners on the high seas, reached England, and revived the interest that Englishmen are at all times ready to give to strange adventures in far-away regions of the earth. Defoe, always acutely conscious of the state of public opinion, and skilled in profiting by it, bethought himself of Alexander Selkirk. He sat down to write a narrative founded on the experiences of the Scottish sailor, in the methodical businesslike manner that long practice in writing had made natural to him, and with no higher

ambition than that of producing a workmanlike, saleable composition. If he had done nothing further than this his name, in spite of the mass of literature which stands to his credit, would, to-day, have been almost forgotten.

But, as he wrote, a power which had lain dormant within him during all his busy years, was aroused, and came forward to guide his fluent pen. The subject was one exactly suited to his peculiar abilities. He possessed, to a wonderful degree, the art of investing his descriptions with an air of reality by means of circumstantial details applied with apparent artlessness. His keen practical nature delighted in overcoming just such apparently insuperable difficulties as those which confronted the hero of this story. His journalistic experience taught him how to place his points tellingly, so that the interest of the reader was never allowed to flag. All these qualities, however, he had shown in previous, and was to show in subsequent, writings. Something over and above these went to the making of *Robinson Crusoe*.

It is not necessary here to give any account of a story which is familiar to every boy and girl. A few of the ways in which Defoe improved upon the original narrative may, however, be pointed out. He cast his hero upon the desert island by means of a shipwreck, thus giving himself an opportunity for a wonderful piece of descriptive writing, and reserved the actual incident of a man being put ashore by his captain for a later stage of his story. He extended the period of exile from four to twenty-eight years. He expanded the hints given in the narrative of Alexander Selkirk into a full and circumstantial account of the ingenious methods by means of which Robinson Crusoe provided for all his daily necessities. He added exciting descriptions of attacks by savages and cannibalistic feasts to give variety to what might otherwise have been in danger of proving a monotonous narrative ; and he introduced into his account of the departure from the island various exciting incidents which brought the narrative to an effective close.

Thus, almost as it were by accident, the great English classic came into being. It had an immediate and remarkable success. Encouraged by this, Defoe wrote in four

months *The Further Adventures of Robinson Crusoe.* But the inspiration under which he had worked had deserted him, and this second part is comparatively tame. Nor did he, in the various works of fiction that he produced during the remaining eleven years of his life, ever attain to the height he had reached in *Robinson Crusoe.*

A book which Defoe published in 1720, and which is now scarcely ever read, gives a curious and somewhat interesting explanation of his great work. *Robinson Crusoe* is, he tells us, an allegory of his own life. But it seems probable that this was an afterthought suggested by his ingenious brain, to forestall any charge of inconsistency which might have been brought against him by critics who read a proposition which he had put forward with regard to the morality of writing a purely fictitious story. "This supplying a story by invention," he had said, "is certainly a most scandalous crime, and yet very little regarded in that part. It is a sort of lying that makes a great hole in the heart, in which by degrees a habit of lying enters in. Such a man comes quickly up to a total disregarding the truth of what he says, looking upon it as a trifle, a thing of no import, whether any story he tells be true or not." These are strange words to come from the man who was one of the most important of the progenitors of the modern novel, and Defoe, as we have said, tried to cover the inconsistency by representing his work as a story which is "the beautiful representation of a life of unexampled misfortunes, and of a variety not to be met with in this world." In its variety Defoe's life might certainly be compared to that of his hero:

> No man hath tasted differing fortunes more,
> For thirteen times have I been rich and poor.

The shipwreck which occurred twenty-eight years before the date when the story ends may possibly be taken to symbolize Defoe's bankruptcy which took place twenty-eight years before *Robinson Crusoe* was written. But it is useless to attempt to pursue the allegory farther, and the *Serious Reflections* are only valuable as giving us a glimpse into the workings of a mind made subtle and casuistical

by long practice in the less worthy arts of political controversy.

Defoe died in 1731, and was buried in the Dissenters' burying-ground of Bunhill Fields. In his own day he was generally regarded as a dangerous and not too scrupulous political agent. A succeeding age exalted him into a great writer and a martyr to the Nonconformist cause. To-day we are content to think of him as the author of *Robinson Crusoe*.

XI

THE JOURNAL TO STELLA GULLIVER'S TRAVELS

IN the opening year of the reign of William III Sir William Temple, the statesman who is known to history as the author of the Triple Alliance, retired to his estate of Moor Park, in Surrey, there to spend the remainder of his life. The household over which he ruled had something of a patriarchal character. There was Lady Temple, lovable and charming as when, thirty years before, she had written the delightful love-letters that are read with such interest to-day. There was Lady Giffard, Temple's sister; and there was Lady Giffard's companion, or waiting-maid, Mrs Johnson, with her two little daughters. There was Rebecca Dingley, a girl whose connexion with the family is not quite clear. There was a raw Irish lad, Jonathan Swift, a distant relation of Lady Temple, who acted as Sir William's secretary for "twenty pounds a year and his board"; and there was Jonathan's "little parson cousin," Tom, who was the household chaplain.

The life of a dependent in a great household is never without its drawbacks, and in the seventeenth century those drawbacks were probably even more serious than they are to-day. Sir William was kind and just, always courteous and dignified, but never familiar to the subordinate members of his household. We know that the thought of his displeasure struck terror into the heart of his moody, sensitive secretary. In after days he recalled how he "used to be in pain when Sir W. Temple would look cold and out of humour for three or four days, and used to suspect a hundred reasons." The uncouth manners of the Irish lad and the haughty irritable temper which was not entirely hidden even

under the wholesome awe that Sir William's attainments and reputation imposed upon him, made him no very pleasant companion. The members of the household who sat with him at the second table thought him awkward and unpleasing. They sneered at his fierce pride and laughed at his ungainly figure; but they took care that he should not hear them sneer or laugh, for not one of them could stand before the glance of his eyes, so strangely and vividly blue, as they looked out under their black brows, darting fire.

There was one person in the household who neither looked down on Swift nor feared him. This was little Esther Johnson, the youngest daughter of Lady Giffard's waiting-maid. When Swift came to Moor Park she was eight years old, a bright, merry child with large dark eyes and a lovely face. She was the darling of the household, and for her the social distinctions that vexed the others did not exist. Lady Temple and Lady Giffard petted and indulged her, and even dignified Sir William unbent when the little maid tried her pretty blandishments upon him. The servants adored and spoilt her, her mother and sister looked on with pride as they saw the whole house at her feet. But Jonathan Swift speedily became her chief ally. He taught her to write, and as she grew up he directed her reading, supplying her with books from Sir William's fine library. They roamed about the grounds, which were the glory of Moor Park and Sir William's great pride and occupation. Both of them admired with all their hearts the trim walks, the stiff, quaintly shaped flower-beds, the canal which ran across the grounds, straight as art could make it. Little Esther found that the awkward moody lad made a splendid playfellow, when he was away from unsympathetic eyes and ears. She learnt to love and admire him, and to defer unquestioningly to his opinions on all subjects. Her affection touched his proud and lonely heart, and her girlish deference soothed the irritation which the circumstances of his position continually excited. So began the famous friendship that, almost as much as his works, has caused the name of Swift to be held in remembrance.

With one or two short periods of absence, during the longest of which he was ordained deacon, and then priest,

Swift remained at Moor Park until the death of Sir William Temple in 1699. He studied in the famous library, reading especially classical and historical works. Temple, as he came to recognize the exceptional ability of his secretary, entrusted him with tasks of increasing importance, and Swift gained much by contact with the trained man of affairs, who had known what it was to guide the destinies of a kingdom. Temple's style in writing—that 'gentlemanly' style that Charles Lamb so admired, Swift did not imitate. He wrote many verses, none of any special merit, and showed in them the qualities which were to distinguish his later work—a marked ability to say the exact thing he wanted to say in the clearest, most unmistakable language. In 1697 he wrote *The Battle of the Books*, in connexion with a discussion then occupying many men of learning as to the relative merits of ancient and modern authors.

When Temple died he left his secretary a hundred pounds, and the right to publish the works he left in manuscript, the profits of which might perhaps amount to another two hundred. He had also obtained for Swift a promise of advancement in the Church from William III. Thus far had Swift advanced by the time he had reached his thirty-third year.

Esther Johnson was now "one of the most beautiful, graceful, and agreeable young women in London. Her hair was blacker than a raven, and every feature of her face in perfection." The affectionate intimacy between the two had grown closer with the years. Swift had carefully trained his pupil to regard love, in the ordinary sense of the word, as an unreasonable and uncertain passion, far below friendship in its highest form, which was the relationship that he wished to exist between them.

William III's promise to Temple was not fulfilled, and Swift was obliged to seek diligently for some post by means of which he might earn his bread. He obtained at last, in 1701, the small living of Laracor, a village about twenty miles from Dublin. Here, a few months afterward, came Rebecca Dingley and Esther Johnson. Sir William had left Esther a small property, and Swift persuaded her that her modest income would go farther in Ireland than in England.

During the next ten years Swift paid several visits to London, and became known to some of the great men of the day, but his headquarters were at Laracor. In 1710, however, the Tories came into power. They were anxious to enlist upon their side a writer of conspicuous ability whose services would balance those that Addison rendered to the Whigs, and they tried very hard to bring Swift (who was known as the author of many political pamphlets and several longer works, including the famous *Tale of a Tub*) over to their side. The efforts they made were in the end successful. Swift was disgusted with his treatment by the Whigs, with whom he disagreed on many points. He left Laracor in charge of a curate, settled himself in London, and entered on a political career. Swift was now forty-two years old. The awkward Irish lad had grown tall and stately, the moody countenance had taken on an imperious expression, the azure blue eyes could still beam softly or glower terribly, at the will of their owner. He had a charm of manner which, when he chose to exert it, made him a delightful companion, and gained for him the sincere friendship of men and women, gentle and simple alike. His strange story is full of examples of the remarkable and sometimes tragical results which followed from the fascination he exercised on those around him. But in general his manner was brusque and overbearing, often even positively rude. The contempt and distaste with which he regarded mankind, considered as a mass, are plainly visible in his behaviour, and though he was capable of the warmest attachment to individuals, that did not make him despise the less "the animal called man."

But at this period when life was so full of interest and activity the dark unhappy thoughts which were wont to torment him left him for a time at peace. His nature required that the great powers he possessed should be kept in full and active employment; otherwise his mental state became morbid and unhealthy. Political activity he specially loved. He delighted in feeling that he had penetrated to the very centre of the nation's business, and exercised upon it a guiding and controlling power; and he was not above the more vulgar satisfaction which comes from flaunting one's

own importance before the eyes of one's fellows. Both these feelings were soon to be amply gratified.

His breach with the Whigs became final, and overtures from the Tory leaders followed. "To-day," he wrote to Esther Johnson, on October 4, 1710, "I was brought privately to Mr Harley, who received me with the greatest respect and kindness imaginable; he appointed me an hour on Saturday at four, afternoon, when I will open my business to him." On Saturday "he spoke so many things of personal kindness and esteem for me, that I am inclined half to believe what some friends have told me, that he would do everything to bring me over." By October 16, Swift had 'gone over.' "I suppose," he wrote, "I have said enough in this and a former letter how I stand with the new people; ten times better than ever I did with the old; forty times more caressed. I am to dine to-morrow at Mr Harley's; and if he continues as he has begun, no man has ever been better treated by another." Swift responded to these overtures by throwing all his energies into his efforts to serve the Government. He wrote pamphlets, and he used all the influence which his powerful personality and his growing reputation gave him, in the interests of his new friends. In February 1711 there came a check. Harley offered him a fifty-pound note, which was refused with great indignation. Swift disdained to be treated as a hireling—as Defoe, for instance, who was at this time in Harley's pay, was treated. Harley was obliged to sue humbly for pardon, but for ten days Swift refused to be pacified. "If we let these great ministers pretend too much," he wrote to Esther Johnson, "there will be no governing them." At last he consented to a reconciliation, and Harley, in return, admitted him to the 'Saturday dinners' at which only those belonging to the inner circle of the Government were to be seen. Swift was greatly elated, but behaved with his usual arrogance. "Lord Rivers was got there before me," he told Stella, "and I chid him for presuming to come on a day when only Lord Keeper, the Secretary, and I were to be there; but he regarded me not; so we all dined together. . . . They call me nothing but Jonathan; and I said, I believed they would leave me Jonathan as they found me,

and that I never knew a ministry do anything for those whom they make companions of their pleasures; and I believe you will find it so; but I care not."

It is probable, however, that Swift did care, and that he was even then beginning to chafe at his reward being so long delayed. He would not accept a fifty-pound note, but he would willingly have accepted a bishopric or other high office in the Church. But as vacancies occurred they were filled by lesser men, and Swift was passed over. His friends flattered him by saying he could not be spared from London, but they knew the real reason was the Queen's doubts of his orthodoxy in religion.

The most famous political tract written by Swift at this time was *The Conduct of the Allies*, which is said to have been instrumental in bringing about the Peace of Utrecht. It raised Swift to a position of the highest importance. Dukes sued for his friendship, and a crowd of applicants besieged him with entreaties that he would use his influence to obtain for them places and pensions. All this pleased Swift mightily, and he lorded it over less favoured men in undisguised elation. "When I came to the antechamber to wait before prayers," wrote Bishop Kennet, in 1713, "Dr Swift was the principal man of talk and business, and acted as minister of requests. He was soliciting the Earl of Arran to speak to his brother, the Duke of Ormond, to get a chaplain's place established in the garrison of Hull, for Mr Fiddes, a clergyman of that neighbourhood, who had lately been in jail, and published sermons to pay fees. He was promising Mr Thorold to undertake with my Lord Treasurer that according to his petition he should obtain a salary of two hundred pounds per annum, as Minister of the English Church at Rotterdam. He stopped F. Gwynne, Esq., going in with the red bag to the queen, and told him aloud he had something to say to him from my Lord Treasurer. He talked with the son of Dr Davenant, to be sent abroad, and took out his pocket-book, and wrote down several things as memoranda, to do for him. . . . Then he instructed a young nobleman that the best poet in England was Mr Pope (a Papist) who had begun a translation of Homer into English, for which, he

said, he must have them all subscribe. 'For,' says he, 'the author *shall not* begin to print till *I have* a thousand guineas for him.'"

Such was Swift in his full-blown glory. But there was another side to his life even during this period of triumph. He went home from brilliant assemblies where he had scolded Duchesses and instructed the finest gallants of the day how they should behave; from jaunts to Windsor with Cabinet Ministers as his companions; from dinners with the Brotherhood Club, where the greatest men of the day met for talk and good-fellowship—to his modest lodging in St James's Street. There, after picking off the coals with which his Irish servant, Patrick, had unnecessarily piled the fire—for the parsimonious habits of his earlier days still clung to him, and, indeed, money was, even now, not too plentiful—he got into bed; and sitting up, with the fur-trimmed night-cap, presented to him by Rebecca Dingley, upon his head, he wrote the delightful journal-letters to Esther Johnson, or Stella, as he called her, which tell us most of what we know of his life at this period. He tells how Patrick has been misbehaving, and how the bill for coals and candles sometimes comes to three shillings a week; how that morning he had had an attack of the giddiness and sickness which he dreaded so much, and how a visitor had come and sat with him two hours and drunk a pint of ale that cost him fivepence; how there was a coldness between him and Mr Addison for political reasons, and how he had dined with Mr Secretary St John, on condition he might choose his company. He teases Stella about her bad spelling, her losses at cards, the fine company she keeps. He inquires tenderly about her ailments and bids her save her "precious eyes," which are inclined to weakness, by letting Dingley read the letter to her and write the answer. He uses the endearing "little language" which was probably a survival from the childish days at Moor Park. Stella is Ppt—which means Poppet; Swift himself is Pdfr—perhaps poor dear foolish rogue; M D is "my dear," and sometimes stands for Stella, sometimes for Stella and Dingley both. "I assure oo," he writes, "it im vely late now; but zis goes to-morrow; and I must

have time to converse with my own deerichar M D. Nite de deer Sollahs, Rove Pdfr." His political friends would probably have had some difficulty in identifying him as the author of letters such as these.

But there was one subject on which Swift did not write to Stella with perfect openness. He did not tell her how large a part a certain Mrs Vanhomrigh and her two daughters were beginning to take in his daily life. He mentions the occasions when he dines there, but he does not say how many hours he idled away in the comfortable homely parlour of "Neighbour Van," and how he had taken up once more his old office of tutor—this time to another Esther, Esther Vanhomrigh, to whom he gave the name of Vanessa. Nor does he tell what great attraction the young girl is beginning to have for him, and how she hangs upon his words in just the same way that the other Esther did in the old days at Moor Park. He persuades himself that there is no need to tell all this, that a man may surely have two friends, though he may only have one wife; that Esther is a dear child, but Stella, his old friend, is dearer still, and nothing can shake his allegiance to her. All this is very likely true; yet he knows in his heart that his action is not in accordance with the proud ideal of sincerity and uprightness which he has always held, and which he has taught both his pupils to hold also.

In June 1713 Swift at last obtained promotion, but it was not the promotion he had hoped for. He was appointed to the deanery of St Patrick's, Dublin, and after the defeat of the Tory party in 1714 he took up his residence there. "You are to understand," he wrote to Bolingbroke, "that I live in the corner of a vast, unfurnished house; my family consists of a steward, a groom, a helper in the stable, a footman, and an old maid, who are all at board wages, and when I do not dine abroad or make an entertainment (which last is very rare), I eat a mutton pie and drink half a pint of wine; my amusements are defending my small dominions against the archbishop, and endeavouring to reduce my rebellious choir." This change from his busy triumphant life in London weighed heavily on Swift's spirits. "I live a country life in town," he said, "see nobody, and go every day once to

prayers, and hope in a few months to grow as stupid as the present situation of affairs will require." Stella and Rebecca Dingley lived near the deanery, and Swift saw them constantly. But the relations between the two were not as perfect as in the old days. Each still loved the other, and tried to act as though nothing was changed. But each was conscious of a difference, and this consciousness made their daily intercourse uneasy and strained. Swift knew that he had not been perfectly loyal to the woman whose life he had so long dominated. He owed it to her at least that the friendship he offered her, and which was to serve her in place of the love she might have received from another man, should be staunch and flawless. The knowledge that he had failed in this obvious duty made the daily intercourse which had once been his delight a painful pleasure. Rumours of the "Vanessa" episode had perhaps reached Stella, though she gave no sign. Time might have brought back the old happy freedom if the two had been left undisturbed. But in 1715 Esther Vanhomrigh came to Ireland. Her mother was dead, and the property which she had left to her daughters was situated near Dublin. This was the ostensible reason for Esther and her sister settling at Cellbridge, a few miles from the capital; but the passion which Esther (who knew nothing of the existence of Stella) had conceived for Swift supplied a more powerful motive. Swift's teaching, in her case, had been in vain. Esther could not, as Stella had done, stifle her feelings, and accept her master's dictum that friendship was superior to the unreasonable and fleeting passion called love. A meeting between the two Esthers might any day take place; and Swift had the misery of feeling that both the women who loved him were unhappy and might be still unhappier through his fault.

He tried conscientiously to put his heart into the duties of his office. He was zealous, as he always had been, for the honour of the Church. He improved the cathedral services, and saw that the building was kept in good condition. To the poor he appeared in the character most natural to him, that of a benevolent though terrifying despot. Parsimonious as he was, his almsgiving had always been on a royal scale,

and now, while the housekeeping at the deanery was carried on in a manner which shocked the liberal notions of the Irish gentry, large sums were regularly bestowed upon the poor old women in the by-streets of Dublin who knew the Dean and blessed him. If some of those whom he relieved were offended by his summary methods and his overbearing ways there were not wanting those who appreciated his biting humour, and years afterward men told stories they had heard from their fathers and mothers about the sayings and doings of "the Dane."

But there were many hours which these occupations failed to fill. There were long lonely evenings during which Swift sat in his library, haunted by bitter memories and racked with present cares. He felt that his tormented brain could bear no more, and that madness threatened him. It was probably purely as a means of diverting his thoughts that he began a new work. During the winter of 1713–14, the last which he had spent in London, Swift had joined an association of writers, known as the Scriblerus Club. Pope, Gay, and Arbuthnot were the other prominent members. The object of the club was the production of a satire, which was to be the joint work of all its members. The plan was never carried out, but each member seems to have done something toward fulfilling his part, and it is probable that the idea of his greatest work—*Gulliver's Travels*—first occurred to Swift in connexion with this scheme. This was the work to which he turned when he could bear the loneliness and silence of the deanery no longer. We do not know exactly when it was begun, but in a letter written to Vanessa in 1722 there is a reference to the second part of the work, some portion of which must therefore have been written before that time. It was written slowly. Sometimes Swift seems to have left it altogether, for weeks, and even months. During its progress he probably read *Robinson Crusoe*, for Defoe's work, we know, speedily reached Ireland, and this may have given him some hints and stimulated his activity.

He begins his work, as Defoe had begun *Robinson Crusoe*, with a grave and circumstantial account of the descent, parentage, and early life of his hero, but he brings him far

more quickly to the island where his adventures are to take place. Lemuel Gulliver, like Robinson Crusoe, is the sole survivor from a wreck in which the rest of those on board perish; but, unlike Robinson Crusoe, he reaches not a desert, but a thickly populated island. In the description of the tiny beings, not six inches high, that inhabit it, Swift satirizes the human race. He removes, as it were, the magnifying glass through which men habitually behold their own affairs, and he shows these in their real insignificance and triviality. The account which Reldresal, Secretary of State for Lilliput, gives of the affairs of the country is really a satire upon the political and religious feuds of England at the time when *Gulliver's Travels* was written. "For," says Reldresal, "as flourishing a condition as we may appear to be in to foreigners, we labour under two mighty evils; a violent faction at home, and the danger of an invasion by a most potent enemy from abroad. As to the first, you are to understand that, for above seventy moons past, there have been two struggling parties in this empire, under the names of Tramecksan and Slamecksan, from the high and low heels of their shoes, by which they distinguish themselves. It is alleged, indeed, that the high heels are most agreeable to our ancient constitution; but, however this be, his Majesty hath determined to make use of only low heels in the administration of the government, and all offices in the gift of the crown, as you cannot but observe. . . . The animosities between these two parties run so high that they will neither eat nor drink nor talk with each other. . . . Now, in the midst of these intestine disquiets, we are threatened with an invasion from the island of Blefuscu, which is the other great empire of the universe, almost as large and powerful as this of his Majesty. . . . It began upon the following occasion: It is allowed on all hands that the primitive way of breaking eggs before we eat them was upon the larger end; but his present Majesty's grandfather, while he was a boy, going to eat an egg and breaking it according to the ancient practice, happened to cut one of his fingers. Whereupon the Emperor, his father, published an edict, commanding all his subjects, upon great penalties, to break the smaller end of their eggs. The

people so highly resented this law that, our histories tell us, there have been six rebellions raised on that account; wherein one Emperor lost his life, and another his crown. These civil commotions were constantly fomented by the monarchs of Blefuscu; and when they were quelled, the exiles always fled for refuge to that empire. It is computed that eleven thousand persons have at several times suffered death rather than submit to break their eggs at the smaller end. . . . Now the Big-endian exiles have found so much credit in the Emperor of Blefuscu's Court and so much private assistance and encouragement from their party here at home, that a bloody war hath been carried on between the two empires for six-and-thirty moons, with various success."

But the book is not merely a political satire. It may indeed be read simply as a delightful story of wonderful adventures, and is no more dependent for its interest upon its underlying political allegory than is *Robinson Crusoe* upon the moral teaching which Defoe declared was its primary purpose. "A Voyage to Lilliput" delights the imagination of the child and at the same time satisfies the keen intellectual tastes of the scholar. It is full of a characteristic humour which does not, as in some of Swift's works, tend to become coarse or savage. The King of Lilliput, who was "taller by almost the breadth of my nail than any of his court," the officers who searched Gulliver and described his watch as "a wonderful kind of engine" which they conjectured to be "either some unknown animal or the God that he worshipped"; the fine Court ladies who visited him in their coaches and were driven round his table, to which a movable rim, five inches high, had been fixed to prevent accidents; all these play their parts with a gravity and reasonableness which, in such tiny creatures, is irresistibly mirth-provoking and delightful.

The second book of *Gulliver's Travels* tells of the voyage to Brobdingnag, a country peopled with giants who seemed "as tall as an ordinary spire-steeple." Here the grass in the fields was twenty feet high, and the corn forty feet, the rats were the size of a large mastiff, the wasps as big as partridges, and the larks nine times as large as a full-grown turkey. The satire in this book is more general, and the writer attempts to

show how petty and ignoble many of our social prejudices and time-honoured customs would appear in the eyes of a race whose conceptions were larger and loftier than our own. The King of Brobdingnag often amused himself by asking Gulliver questions concerning his country and his people. His interest in the race of pygmies, represented by this strange visitor to his land, was strong enough to make him wish for a full and detailed account of their manners and customs. After this had been given " in five audiences, each of several hours," the King summed up his impressions. " By what I have gathered from your own relation," he said, " and the answers I have with much pains wringed and extorted from you, I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth."

It was, perhaps, soon after the " Voyage to Brobdingnag " was finished that a public event drew Swift from the retirement in which, for ten years, he had lived. A patent had been given to a man named Wood for the manufacture of copper coins—popularly known as Wood's Halfpence—to be circulated in Ireland. Swift opposed the contract, and wrote against it his famous *Drapier's Letters* (1724). These for a time brought him again into prominence, and his hopes of preferment in England revived. In 1726 he came to England and endeavoured to push his cause. But once more he failed to obtain anything more substantial than flattery and promises. Disgusted and embittered he returned to his Irish deanery.

The peculiar hatred of mankind, which, in spite of all his splendid charity and his strong attachments to individuals, had always marked Swift's relations with his fellows, had now grown into an overmastering passion of loathing and contempt. " I heartily hate and detest that animal called man," he had written to Pope in 1725, " although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth." When, in his lonely and silent house, he sat down to finish *Gulliver's Travels*, this feeling was strong upon him. Age and weakness were causing the strong control which his will had exercised upon his passions to become relaxed. Sorrow of the worst

kind had visited him; Vanessa was dead, as he could not but believe, of a broken heart, through his fault; Stella, the being he had always loved best in the world, was dying. The intense agony of his mind was hastening the oncoming of the terrible mental malady whose approach he had, through many terrible years, awaited with shuddering horror. It is therefore, perhaps, scarcely surprising to find that the last two books of *Gulliver's Travels*—"A Voyage to Laputa," and "A Voyage to the Houyhnhnms"—are altogether lacking in the charm which the previous part of the book possesses. They are savage attacks upon the human race, painful to read, and almost impossible to discuss. They are the product of a diseased mind, and bear about them the marks of disease, along with the unmistakable marks of genius. The Laputans, so absorbed in profitless studies that they had no attention to spare for the common duties and moralities of life; the people of Lagado, who spent their lives in such vain projects as attempting to extract sunshine from cucumbers; the spirits of the dead; the courtiers of Luggnagg, who approached their king crawling upon their stomachs and licking the dust of the floor; the Struldbrugs, or immortals, doomed after the age of four score to pass countless ages in the lowest state of senile decay, hated and despised by all, and longing vainly for death to end their misery; and, worst of all, the Yahoos, the loathsome, bestial caricatures of man, who lived in subjection to the wise and noble Houyhnhnms, or horses—all these show the utter and savage contempt which Swift felt for his fellow-men.

In January 1728 Stella died, and on the night of her death Swift wrote down some of his recollections of the woman he had loved so long. The hopeless agony of spirit that he felt is shown plainly in the brief bald sentences wrung from his sad heart. He could love deeply, though after a selfish fashion, and could grieve truly and faithfully for the one he loved. But grief only served to make his temper more fierce and savage. *Gulliver's Travels*, published in 1726, had spread his fame throughout Europe, but he showed little gratification at tributes from the race he despised so heartily. He alienated many of his friends by his harsh and imperious

temper, and gathered round himself a company of sycophants who bore his savage outbreaks for the sake of the gifts to be obtained through his lordly munificence. Side by side with this munificence grew the miserliness which made him stint himself, his household, and his guests in a manner which rendered social intercourse difficult and almost impossible. His bodily health declined and his fits of overpowering melancholy became more and more frequent. The activity of a brain incapable of sustained effort drove him to the production of a great deal of worthless literature, consisting mainly of puns, riddles, acrostics, and the grimmest of jokes. Some of his friends remained faithful throughout this dreary period, and occasionally there came flashes of the old genius lighting the way. But, taken as a whole, the years which followed Stella's death were years of gradual but steady decay. The mental disease crept on, gaining ever more and more ground until, in 1741, Swift was declared incapable of managing his own affairs and was placed under control. Four years of this death in life followed, until in October 1745 the end came, and the great but unhappy genius, Jonathan Swift, died, quietly and painlessly, like a child.

XII

JOHNSON'S DICTIONARY: THE LIVES OF THE POETS

IN the year 1737 there travelled up to London from their native town of Lichfield a big, burly young man, twenty-eight years old, with a younger, slighter companion, whose mobile, expressive face and quick movements formed a strong contrast to the heavy strength which marked both the countenance and gait of the other. The elder traveller was, indeed, a queer, uncouth figure. His huge form was clad in garments that were soiled and torn and arranged in slovenly fashion. His face was disfigured by the disease known as the king's evil, and his short-sighted, peering eyes gave the final grotesque touch to a countenance which might, from the regularity of its features and from its look of massive strength, have been dignified and impressive. Ever and again the great limbs twitched convulsively, and the powerful hands were raised in awkward gesticulations, so that passers-by turned to look at the curious figure and laughed as they went on their way. The two travellers had come to London to seek their fortunes, with a few shillings and two or three letters of introduction in their pockets. The elder had also as capital three acts of a tragedy he had written, called *Irene*, a store of classical learning, and some small literary experience. The younger had his mobile face, great powers of mimicry, and strong dramatic talent.

Little good came from the letters of introduction, except that they enabled the two to raise a joint loan of five pounds for immediate necessities. Then began the search for a means of livelihood. The younger man applied for employment at the theatres, where he had some friends, and here his wonderful talent was soon recognized, so that he rose

rapidly and became known to the world as the great actor, David Garrick. The elder man found more difficulty; and his need was even greater than his friend's, for he had left behind him at Lichfield a wife for whom he wished to make a home. He offered his services to many booksellers, but obtained only the scantiest and worst-paid hack-work. He lodged in a wretched garret, and dined at the cheapest of the miserable taverns that were to be found in the poorest quarter of London. Sometimes even these were beyond his reach, and then, cold and hungry, he walked all night about the dark and empty streets, or lay down in some corner among the city's beggars and thieves. Such were the experiences which marked the early attempts of Samuel Johnson to gain a living by his pen.

It was only very gradually that things improved. In 1738 Johnson managed to publish his poem of *London*, which brought him to the notice of Pope and some other celebrated men. The merit of the poem was recognized, and some attempts were made to obtain for Johnson a position which would afford him a chance of earning an adequate income, but they came to nothing, and the only reward that Johnson received was the ten guineas paid him by his bookseller.

Nearly ten more years passed in ill-paid and arduous toil as a bookseller's hack. Johnson began to be known as a man whose work had a scholarly quality, but little credit was to be gained from the composition of sermons, prefaces, indexes, and advertisements, on which he was mainly occupied. One day, in 1747, he was sitting in the shop of a bookseller named Robert Dodsley, and talking over various literary plans. "I believe," said Dodsley, "that a dictionary of the English language is a work that is greatly needed, and one which would be well received by the public." Johnson considered the suggestion. "I believe," he said, after a pause, "that I shall not undertake it." The idea of compiling a dictionary had occurred to him before, but the words of the bookseller gave definiteness to what had been only a vaguely conceived plan. Finally he resolved that he would undertake the work. At Dodsley's suggestion he wrote to Lord Chesterfield,

Secretary of State, sending an outline of his scheme, in the hope of receiving the great man's patronage.

Preliminary arrangements were soon completed. Johnson was to receive fifteen hundred and seventy-five pounds for the work, which he expected to finish in three years. Out of this he would have to pay several assistants. The large amount of drudgery involved was very distasteful to him, for he was constitutionally indolent, and hated sustained labour. Seven years of this toil were before him, for his *Dictionary* was not finished until 1755. In his preface he records his views concerning the work which had occupied him for so long. "Those who toil at the lower employments of life," he says, "miss the rewards which attend on the higher branches of industry. Among these unhappy mortals is the writer of dictionaries, whom mankind have considered, not as the pupil, but the slave of science, the pioneer of literature, doomed only to remove rubbish and clear obstructions from the paths through which Learning and Genius press forward to conquest and glory, without bestowing a smile on the humble drudge that facilitates their progress." In the *Dictionary* itself he defines a lexicographer as "a harmless drudge, that busies himself in tracing the original and detailing the significance of words." In Johnson's day etymology, in a scientific sense, was unknown, and consequently we shall not expect to find him attempting to trace out the historical processes by which the language has been developed. He contents himself with making a collection of the words it contains, defining the meaning of these, and adding illustrative quotations. Where the etymology is obvious, or well known, he gives it; where it is unknown he sometimes makes a whimsical guess. But the chief feature of his *Dictionary* is its illustrative passages. "When first I collected these authorities," he says, "I was desirous that every quotation should be useful to some other end than the illustration of a word: I therefore extracted from philosophers principles of science, from historians remarkable facts; from chymists complete processes; from divines striking exhortations and from poets beautiful descriptions." Before long, however, he found that he was "forced to reduce his

transcripts very often to clusters of words in which scarcely any meaning is retained." "Some passages," he says, "I have yet spared, which may relieve the labour of verbal searches, and intersperse with verdure of flowers the dusty deserts of barren philology."

As a rule Johnson's definitions are logical and accurate. Some are rather amusingly coloured by his political prejudices. A pension, he says, is "an allowance made to anyone without an equivalent. In England it is generally understood to mean pay given to a state-hireling for treason to his country." Excise he defines as "a hateful tax levied upon commodities, and adjudged, not by the common judges of property, but wretches hired by those to whom excise is paid." With regard to the orthography of the words he says, "I have endeavoured to proceed with a scholar's reverence for antiquity, and a grammarian's regard to the genius of our tongue"; and he adds, "I am not yet so lost in lexicography as to forget that words are the daughters of earth and that things are the sons of heaven."

"The English dictionary," he says in conclusion, "was written with little assistance of the learned, and without any patronage of the great; not in the soft obscurities of retirement, or under the shelter of academick bowers, but amidst inconvenience and distraction, in sickness and in sorrow. . . . I have protracted my work till most of those whom I wished to please have sunk into the grave, and success and miscarriage are empty sounds. I therefore dismiss it with frigid tranquillity, having little to fear or hope from censure or from praise."

The above extracts from the preface to the *Dictionary* illustrate the English style to which, by 1755, Johnson had attained. There is, however, another piece of prose-writing, the most famous and widely known of all his compositions, which is always associated with the publication of the *Dictionary*. This is the celebrated letter to Lord Chesterfield. Chesterfield, it seems, had given him some hopes of help and patronage, but these had not been fulfilled. When the *Dictionary* was on the eve of publication, and was beginning to be talked about, it apparently occurred to the noble lord

that the dedication of such a work to himself would add to his importance as a patron of literature. He therefore wrote two articles, which were published in *The World*, a magazine which circulated among men of fashion. In these he set forward the need of a dictionary, and paid to Johnson various compliments upon his learning and literary ability. But Johnson quickly saw through the manœuvre, and his reply to it was the immortal letter. We will quote two paragraphs from this :

"Seven years, my lord, have now passed, since I waited in your outward rooms, or was repulsed from your door ; during which time I have been pushing on my work through difficulties of which it is useless to complain, and have brought it at last to the verge of publication, without one act of assistance, one word of encouragement, or one smile of favour. Such treatment I did not expect, for I never had a patron before. . . .

"Is not a patron, my lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help? The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind ; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it ; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it ; till I am known, and do not want it. I hope it is no very cynical asperity not to confess obligations where no benefit has been received, or to be unwilling that the public should consider me as owing that to a patron which Providence has enabled me to do for myself."

The sturdy independence of Johnson's spirit, his powers of irony, and the stately, measured periods he loved to use, are all illustrated in this famous letter. The melancholy of its tone we have seen repeated in the closing passage of the preface. With Johnson melancholy was constitutional, but he had, moreover, at this time, heavy cause for sadness. In March 1752 his wife, who had joined him in London some time previously, had died. From this blow Johnson never fully recovered. Mrs Johnson was twenty years older than her husband ; she was, Garrick tells us, very fat, her cheeks were covered with rouge, her dress was tawdry, her manners

affected and unpleasing. Yet Johnson loved her tenderly. To his short-sighted eyes she was beautiful, and to the end of his life he mourned his "dear Tetty," and kept the anniversary of her death with fasting and prayer. "This is the day," he wrote, when his own life was rapidly drawing to a close, "on which, in 1752, dear Tetty died. I have now uttered a prayer of repentance and contrition; perhaps Tetty knows that I prayed for her. Perhaps Tetty is now praying for me. God help me. Thou, God, art merciful, hear my prayers and enable me to trust in Thee."

But in spite of this great and natural despondency the most prosperous, and probably the happiest part of Johnson's life was, in 1755, yet to come. He was forty-six years old, strong and vigorous in body and intellect. His material circumstances had improved, and were still improving. His fame as a writer already stood higher than that of any man of his day, and he was beginning to be known for those conversational powers to which, almost more than to his writings, he owes his fame. In 1749 he had published his poem, *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. In the same year, through the good offices of his old friend, Garrick, his tragedy, *Irene*, had been produced at Drury Lane, and though, on the whole, it was a failure, it had brought Johnson a substantial sum of money and some increase of reputation. From March 1750 to March 1752 he was engaged on *The Rambler*, a paper published twice a week, and for each number he received two guineas. Easier circumstances had developed his social tendencies, which in certain directions were strong. For fashionable society Johnson was altogether unfitted. His person was awkward, his dress slovenly; the convulsive twitchings and swayings which resulted from natural infirmity and the uncouth habits formed during the years spent in extreme poverty, made him a ludicrous, and, in some eyes, a disgusting figure. Lord Chesterfield called him "a respectable Hottentot, who throws his meat anywhere but down his throat." "He laughs," said Tom Davies, "like a rhinoceros" But in a company of congenial friends Johnson shone. He was, to use the word he himself invented, a "clubbable" man. The ordinary chit-chat of society he despised, but

he loved to meet his friends in the parlour of a tavern, and "fold his legs and have his talk out." As early as 1749 he had formed a club which met each week at a "famous beef-steak house" in Ivy Lane. This, in 1764, was superseded by another known in literary history as "The Club," which met at the Turk's Head, Gerrard Street, Soho. To this club belonged Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke, David Garrick, Edward Gibbon, James Boswell, and many other famous men of the period. It is to the last-named member, a young Scottish laird whose admiration for Johnson was the leading passion of his life, that we owe the full knowledge we possess of the proceedings of this club. In his *Life of Johnson* Boswell records in the utmost detail the sayings and doings of his idol, so that we learn to know the great literary dictator as a familiar friend. We know all about his brusque, dictatorial manner, and the crushing blows he dealt his conversational opponents. We know, too, something about his kind and tender heart, and the way in which he made his house a refuge for various waifs and strays who, without his help, would have been almost destitute.

In 1759 he published *Rasselas*, a moral story with an Oriental setting. In 1762 a pension of three hundred pounds was offered to him by George III. Johnson naturally hesitated as to whether, after the definition that he had given in his *Dictionary*, he could himself become a pensioner without injury to his self-respect. His scruples were set at rest by the assurance that the pension was bestowed not on account of anything he was expected to do, but as a reward for what he had already done; and it was accepted.

After Johnson received his pension he wrote little. He worked hard only when his bread depended upon his efforts. During his later years he gave himself up almost entirely to the particular kind of social intercourse that he loved, and cultivated conversation as a fine art. He was, however, to produce one more great work. In 1777 a syndicate of booksellers, who were planning an edition of the English Poets, asked him if he would furnish a short life of each poet, to form a kind of preface. He was to name his own terms.

Johnson agreed, and asked two hundred guineas for his work. Had he asked a thousand, his biographer tells us, it would have been willingly given. The *Lives of the Poets*, which was the outcome of this negotiation, is Johnson's finest work. His criticisms are, in most cases, just, sound, and independent. In a few instances he was misled by prejudice, as in his famous criticism of Milton's *Lycidas*. "One of the poems on which much praise has been bestowed," he says, "is *Lycidas*; of which the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing. . . . In this poem there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting; whatever images it can supply are easily exhausted, and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind. When Cowley tells of Hervey, that they studied together, it is easy to suppose how much he must miss the companion of his labours and the partner of his discoveries; but what image of tenderness can be excited by these lines?—

> We drove afield, and both together heard
> What time the grayfly winds her sultry horn,
> Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night.

We know that they never drove afield, and had no flocks to batten; and though it be allowed that the representation may be allegorical, the true meaning is so uncertain and remote that it is never sought, because it cannot be known when it is found."

Johnson, as is easily seen, had little appreciation of the imaginative element in poetry and no ear for the subtler harmonies of verse. His first requirement of poetry as well as of prose was that it should be good sense. He saw little difference between poetry and prose except with regard to metre and rhyme. He belonged to the school of Dryden and Pope, and the parallel that he draws between these two poets in his life of Pope shows him perhaps at his best. We will quote a part of this famous passage: "Dryden knew more of man in his general nature, Pope in his local manners. The notions of Dryden were formed by comprehensive speculation;

and those of Pope by minute attention. There is more dignity in the knowledge of Dryden, and more certainty in that of Pope. . . . The style of Dryden is capricious and varied; that of Pope is cautious and uniform. Dryden observes the motions of his own mind; Pope constrains his mind to his own rules of composition. Dryden is sometimes vehement and rapid; Pope is always smooth, uniform and gentle. Dryden's page is a natural field, rising into inequalities, and diversified by the varied exuberance of abundant vegetation; Pope's is a velvet lawn, shaven by the scythe and levelled by the roller."

The *Lives of the Poets* was finished in 1781, and after this Johnson wrote no more. He still reigned as the great dictator in matters literary. All the other writers of the day looked upon his approval as certifying the merit of their work, and dreaded his censure. Thin-skinned poets shrank from the rough and biting criticisms which he did not hesitate to bestow, but there were many who had cause to bless his kindly help. He reigned, like his seventeenth-century namesake, the "great Ben" by virtue of his robust and manly nature, his kind heart and his vigorous genius; and when he died, in 1784, at the age of seventy-five, few men could have been mourned more sincerely or missed more acutely.

"The names of many greater writers," says Sir Leslie Stephen, "are inscribed upon the walls of Westminster Abbey; but scarcely anyone lies there whose heart was more acutely responsive during life to the deepest and tenderest of human emotions. In visiting that strange gathering of departed heroes and statesmen and philanthropists and poets, there are many whose words and deeds have a far greater influence upon our imaginations; but there are very few whom, when all has been said, we can love so heartily as Samuel Johnson."

XIII

THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD

NEEDY adventurers from all parts of the three kingdoms drifted up to London as naturally in the eighteenth century as at the present day: and then, as now, the incoming stream brought with it, at rare intervals, a man of genius. We have seen how, in 1737, Johnson and Garrick came up from their homes in Staffordshire, and some twelve years earlier Scotland had sent up her penniless poet, James Thomson, author of *The Seasons*. But it was Ireland that gave to us the poorest, the most lovable, and the most beloved of all this ragged company; and his name was Oliver Goldsmith.

At the time when Johnson left Lichfield Oliver Goldsmith was an awkward, ugly little boy, eight years old, living at the pretty parsonage house which belonged to the quaint Irish village of Lissoy. Everybody laughed at him for his comical face and his simple manners, and many considered him "little better than a fool"; yet everybody loved him for his tender heart and his merry spirit. Of his schooldays we hear the same story. He was stupid at his lessons and clumsy in his play, and he gained affection and ridicule in almost equal measure. When he was sixteen years old he left school, and then came the question, what was to be done with him? His father was only a poor Irish minister, and had neither money nor interest to push the fortunes of this the most unpromising of all his six children. There was, however, an uncle, the Rev. Thomas Contarine, who loved the lad and wished to help him. Oliver, he said, must go to college. But his father was not able to maintain him there, except as a sizar, and Master Oliver's pride rebelled against the indignity of such a position. At last, however, his uncle persuaded him that such ideas were both wrong and

foolish, and in June 1744 Goldsmith entered Trinity College, Dublin.

He remained at the University for five years. During the whole time his allowance was of the scantiest, and when, in 1747, his father died, matters became even worse than before. He had nothing to depend on save the supplies which his uncle Contarine managed to send him. When these failed he begged a loan from a friend, or pawned some of his poor clothes, or earned five shillings by writing a ballad, which was sung in the streets and sold for a penny a copy. He studied as little as he possibly could, and was so idle, careless, and riotous in his behaviour that he was constantly in disgrace. Once he ran away from the University, and made his way home, but his elder brother persuaded him to go back. Finally, in 1749, Goldsmith, though his name stood at the bottom of the list, succeeded in gaining his degree, and so brought his college career to a close.

He went back to his mother's house at Lissoy, and settled contentedly down to a life of idleness. During the day he lounged about the village, or helped his mother and his brother in small matters, and when the evening came he made his way to the village inn, where he drank and sang with the humble company assembled there. To his careless, easy nature the thought of what was to become of him in the future gave no concern, but his family began to be anxious. Oliver was now twenty-one, and bid fair to turn out a ne'er-do-well. Something must be done. They persuaded him to try to enter the Church as a minister, but, for some reason or other, the Bishop refused his application. They found him a post as a tutor, but he quarrelled with his patron, and returned home. Then he set out, with the small sum of money he had earned in his pocket, to seek his fortune, but he soon came back without the money, and with a marvellous story to account for his failure. He next thought he would like to try the legal profession, and his kind uncle Contarine gave him fifty pounds with which to go to London and start on his career. Goldsmith, however, did not get farther than Dublin: there he gambled away the fifty pounds, and returned once more to his friends. Again he was forgiven, and his next

idea was to become a doctor. Once more his uncle provided him with funds, and in 1752 Goldsmith left for Edinburgh. He never saw Ireland again.

In Edinburgh he lived for about eighteen months, and at the end of that time wrote to his uncle concerning a project of proceeding to Paris and continuing his studies at the university of that city. His uncle sent him twenty pounds and he started for the Continent, but, changing his mind, decided to go to Leyden, where a famous medical professor was lecturing. The lectures did not come up to Goldsmith's expectations, or, which is more probable, his zeal for medical study declined. He left Leyden with a guinea in his pocket, and started on a tour through Europe. Of this strange journey we know very little, but what seems certain is that it was a kind of vagabond's tramp, in which subsistence was from hand to mouth, and no provision was ever made for the morrow. Whether, as Boswell tells us, he "disputed" his way through Europe: whether, like the Vicar's son, in his famous story, he sang, and played on the flute to the peasants for his bread and his night's lodging; whether, as is more probable, he begged from the charitable and did odd jobs for those who would pay for them, still remains a question. From one of the Continental universities it seems fairly certain that he gained a degree, but we do not know from which. It is clear that he visited Antwerp, Brussels, and other towns in Flanders, that he reached Switzerland, crossed the Alps into Italy, and returned through France. On February 1, 1756, he landed at Dover without a penny in his pocket. Once more he was obliged to call upon his wits to pay his travelling expenses, and by this method of journeying he was a fortnight on the road to London. He reached it at last, and began, as so many men had done before him, a struggle for existence in the great city.

For him the struggle was harder than it had been for Johnson, though perhaps it was not so bitter; for if he was without Johnson's sturdy fighting power he had his own Irish versatility and easy hopefulness. It is difficult, however, to imagine how he managed to exist during those first terrible months. In after days he was persistently silent

concerning this period of his life, and only by a few half-joking, casual allusions gave any hint of his sufferings. "When I lived among the beggars in Axe Lane," he once said to a mixed company of people, who were much amazed and inclined to regard the remark as a joke. But it is probable that Goldsmith was speaking sad and sober truth. When we first hear of him he was working in a chemist's shop; then we meet him as a doctor, dressed in a pitifully old green and gold coat, physicking the poor of Bankside. For a time he was employed as a corrector of the press in the printing establishment of Mr Samuel Richardson, and ventured to show to the great moralist a tragedy he had written. But Richardson was scarcely the man to recognize genius in rags, and, moreover, it is difficult to imagine Goldsmith writing a good tragedy. We find him next at Peckham, as usher in a school kept by a certain Dr Milner, and here he seems to have been treated with great kindness, and to have been fairly happy and contented. One day a bookseller named Griffiths dined at Dr Milner's table, and something in the queer, ungainly usher's conversation, or in the tales that were told about him, made the man of business believe that he had stumbled upon a hidden literary genius. He induced Goldsmith to leave his employment and turn hack-writer. Goldsmith removed to Griffiths' house in Paternoster Row, where he was to receive board, lodging, and a small salary in return for his services. There, in company with five or six others, hired on similar terms, he sat down every day to write, for a certain fixed number of hours, articles for Griffiths' *Monthly Review*. After this humble and not very pleasant fashion did Goldsmith begin his literary career.

Such forced and regular labour was not, however, to his taste. His engagement had been for a year, but at the end of five months he quarrelled with Griffiths, and removed to a garret in Fleet Street. For a time he struggled on as a miscellaneous hack-writer. Then he tried Dr Milner's once more, but soon drifted back to literature. From 1758 to 1760 he lived in Green Arbour Court, Old Bailey. Here he seems to have applied himself seriously to his work. He set about that *Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in*

Europe which is the first of his important works. Writing in his miserable garret, amid the squalor and filth of a city slum, Goldsmith's thoughts went back longingly to his dear country of Ireland, and the happy village of Lissoy where his boyhood had been spent. "Whether I eat or starve," he wrote to his sister's husband, who still lived at Lissoy, "live in a first floor, or four pair of stairs high, I still remember my Irish friends with pleasure; nay, my very country comes in for a share of my affection." He vows he would rather hear *Johnny Armstrong's Last Good Night* sung at a Lissoy fireside than the finest efforts of a great singer, and tells how, when he climbs Hampstead Hill and looks over the fine prospect, he can think only of that nearer scene he has looked on so many times from the little mount at Lissoy Gate. His hopefulness was beginning to give way under long-continued poverty and distress; his health, too, was suffering. "It gives me some pain," he wrote to his brother Henry, "to think I am almost beginning the world at the age of thirty-one. Though I never had a day's illness since I saw you, I am not that strong active man you once knew me. You scarcely can conceive how much eight years of disappointment, anguish, and study, have worn me down. . . . Imagine to yourself a pale melancholy visage, with two great wrinkles before the eyebrows, with an eye disgustingly severe, and a big wig; and you have a perfect picture of my present appearance. . . . I can neither laugh nor drink; have contracted a hesitating, disagreeable manner of speaking, and a visage that looks ill-nature itself; in short, I have thought myself into a settled melancholy, and an utter disgust of all that life brings with it."

Poor Goldsmith! He had tired out the patience of friends who had treated him with far more forbearance than he had deserved. Yet their hearts must have ached as they read these piteous letters from their poor exile. Oliver, they perhaps said to one another, had indeed been idle, careless, and ungrateful. Yet he had a warm heart, and a winning way with him, and was always ready to do a poor creature a kindness, and to share his last sixpence with a friend. It was a pity he had ever left old Ireland.

Yet at this time the worst was over, and brighter days were coming for the poor ne'er-do-well. His *Enquiry* brought him considerable reputation, and better-paid work. In October 1759 he became sole contributor to *The Bee*, a paper on the model of Addison's *Spectator*, published by a bookseller of St Paul's Churchyard, and in this paper appeared some of his most delightful essays. In 1760 he removed to respectable lodgings in Wine Office Court, Fleet Street, and was sought after by various booksellers. Much of his work was still hack-work, but it brought him in a fairly comfortable income, and enabled him to move in better society. Soon he began to make the acquaintance of the famous literary men of the day. We do not know the date of his first introduction to Johnson, but we know that Johnson came to supper with him at Wine Office Court on May 31, 1761. The two men, different as they were in habits and disposition, became attached friends. Goldsmith's sensitive nature often suffered severely under Johnson's rough treatment, and Johnson was often annoyed at Goldsmith's foolishness and childish vanity. But the sincere affection which each had for the other held their friendship firm.

Goldsmith was now established as a writer, and was earning an income of about two hundred pounds a year, mainly through a series of sketches which, under the title of *The Citizen of the World*, he contributed to a daily newspaper. He was induced to change his lodgings and live quietly in the country district of Islington, far from the temptations of the town. With ordinary prudence his life would now have been happy and free from care. He was able to relieve his dreary hack-work by other and more congenial toil, and had in hand two masterpieces which were soon to be given to the world. He was received as an honoured member of the circle which contained Johnson, Burke, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and the other famous members of "The Club."

But an income of five times the amount he was now earning would not have kept the careless, generous Irishman out of debt. He had a childish delight in fine clothes, and one of Boswell's best-known anecdotes of Johnson tells how the sage rebuked poor Goldy for his boastfulness concerning a

new bloom-coloured coat, lately arrived from the tailor's. He could never say no to a needy acquaintance who begged for a loan, nor refrain from relieving misery when he saw it. Consequently he was always in debt to his publisher for money advanced on works yet to be written. At intervals he disappeared from his lodgings for short periods, to escape from angry creditors. The climax of his misfortunes came at the latter end of 1764, and the account of this incident is best given in the words of Johnson. "I received one morning a message from poor Goldsmith that he was in great distress and as it was not in his power to come to me, begging that I would come to him as soon as possible. I sent him a guinea, and promised to come to him directly. I accordingly went as soon as I was dressed, and found that his landlady had arrested him for his rent, at which he was in a violent passion. I perceived that he had already changed my guinea, and had got a bottle of Madeira and a glass before him. I put the cork into the bottle, desired he would be calm, and began to talk to him of the means by which he might be extricated. He then told me that he had a novel ready for the press, which he produced to me. I looked into it, and saw its merit; told the landlady I should soon return; and having gone to a bookseller, sold it for sixty pounds. I brought Goldsmith the money, and he discharged his rent, not without rating his landlady in a high tone for having used him so ill."

The novel which Johnson sold was *The Vicar of Wakefield*. The publisher probably accepted it on the great man's recommendation, and, expecting no great things from it, put it on one side until a convenient season for publication. Before that convenient season arrived Goldsmith had, by common consent, passed from the ranks of talented and agreeable essayists into that occupied by men of genius. This was the result of the publication of his poem, *The Traveller*, which appeared in December 1764. Now, while all the town was talking about Goldsmith, was evidently the time for producing *The Vicar of Wakefield*. It appeared in March 1766, and though it was not so immediately acclaimed as had been the case with *The Traveller*, it began, from the very first, quietly and surely to make its way. Its progress has gone on without

a check, and to-day it stands in the front rank among the books that are admired, loved, and read.

The Vicar of Wakefield is the sweet, pure, and simple story of the life of a good man. It is not, like Richardson's *Pamela*, packed with conventional morality, and it is quite free from the coarseness which disfigures *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. When we look back over Oliver Goldsmith's life and think how great a part of it had been passed amid poverty, squalor, and crime ; when we remember that he was familiar with the lowest haunts of great cities and had lived side by side with thieves and with beggars, we cannot help wondering how he managed to write such a book as *The Vicar of Wakefield*. It is a testimony to the native innocence of his spirit, and to his natural affinity for things true and pure and lovely, as well as to his great genius. It proves how fondly he clung to the affections of his childhood, and how fragrant was the memory of his country home through all the later years. The quaint, delightful humour of the book is Goldsmith's own. His fun is sweeter, more delicate and more deliciously unconscious than even Addison's, and Sir Roger appears a trifle starched and a trifle sophisticated by the side of the dear old Vicar, whom no name could suit so well as that which Goldsmith has given him—Dr Primrose. It is said that some of his traits are drawn from the author's own father, and he probably owes something to Fielding's Parson Adams. But his characteristic charm is all his own. It is difficult to pick out the scenes in which he is shown to the best advantage, for he is always delightful. We see him first in his "elegant house," with his wife, whom he chose, "as she did her wedding-gown, not for a fine glossy surface, but for such qualities as would wear well," and his children, "the finest in the country." We follow him through all his losses and misfortunes, and find him the same kindly, humorous, quaintly wise Christian gentleman in his poverty as he was in the days of his wealth. The home life which is pictured throughout the book is perfect in its happy orderliness and its hearty enjoyment of simple pleasures. One of the most beautiful passages in the book describes the Vicar's return to his home, after a short absence. "And now my heart

caught new sensations of pleasure, the nearer I approached that peaceful mansion. As a bird that had been frighted from its nest, my affections outwent my haste, and hovered round my little fireside with all the rapture of expectation. I called up the many fond things I had to say, and anticipated the welcome I was to receive. I already felt my wife's tender embrace, and smiled at the joy of my little ones. As I walked but slowly the night waned apace. The labourers of the day were all retired to rest; the lights were out in every cottage; no sounds were heard but of the shrilling cock, and the deep-mouthed watch-dog, at hollow distance. I approached my little abode of pleasure, and, before I was within a furlong of the place, our honest mastiff came running to welcome me."

When the poor Vicar finds himself in a debtors' prison neither his courage nor his charity forsakes him. The miserable condition of his fellow-prisoners turns his thoughts from his own misfortunes, and he resolves to make an effort for the amendment of those whom he regards as his new parishioners. "I therefore read them a portion of the service with a loud, unaffected voice, and found my audience perfectly merry upon the occasion. Lewd whispers, groans of contrition burlesqued, winking and coughing, alternately excited laughter. However, I continued with my natural solemnity to read on, sensible that what I did might mend some, but could itself receive no contamination from any."

Through all his heavy troubles he shows himself a true and brave man: and renewed prosperity finds him the same simple, trusting, kindly humorous being as before. We are glad that when we leave him he is happy once more with the family he loves. He has celebrated the marriage of his eldest son among the friends who have been faithful to him through his time of adversity, and, as soon as the wedding feast was over, "according to my old custom I requested that the table might be taken away to have the pleasure of seeing all my family once more by a cheerful fireside. My two little ones sat upon each knee, the rest of the company by their partners. I had nothing now on this side of the grave to wish for: all my cares were over; my pleasure

was unspeakable. It now only remained that my gratitude in good fortune should exceed my former submission in adversity."

So ends Goldsmith's beautiful prose idyll, which can scarcely be better described than in his own words. "There are an hundred faults in the thing, and an hundred things might be said to prove them beauties. But it is needless. A book may be amusing with numerous errors, or it may be very dull without a single absurdity. The hero of this piece unites in himself the three greatest characters upon earth; he is a priest, an husbandman, and the father of a family. He is drawn as ready to teach, and ready to obey; as simple in affluence, and majestic in adversity. In this age of opulence and refinement whom can such a character please? Such as are fond of high life will turn with disdain from the simplicity of his country fireside; such as mistake ribaldry for humour will find no wit in his harmless conversation; and such as have been taught to deride religion will laugh at one whose chief stores of comfort are drawn from futurity." The words are true of every age; yet *The Vicar of Wakefield* has never wanted admirers. To write a story having for its hero an old country clergyman, which young and old shall read with eager interest, is no small achievement. And this, to his lasting fame, Goldsmith has done.

The last seven years of Goldsmith's life must be dealt with very briefly. He wrote two plays—*The Good Natured Man*, and *She Stoops to Conquer*—and one great poem—*The Deserted Village*. All three have taken their places as English classics. He did also an enormous amount of hack-work, including compilations and abridgments. These, though they added nothing to his fame, brought him a considerable income. But, in spite of this, to the end of his life he was involved in debt and difficulties. He died in April 1774 of a nervous fever, which was largely due to the worry consequent upon the desperate state of his financial affairs. He was deeply mourned by all those who had loved him, and all those he had helped and loved. A group of wretched creatures whom he had relieved waited, we are told, on the stairs leading to his chambers, and burst into wild weeping when

they heard that he was dead. The members of "The Club" mourned as for a brother. "Poor Goldsmith," wrote Johnson, "is gone. He died of a fever, exasperated as I believe, by the fear of distress. He raised money and squandered it by every artifice of acquisition and folly of expense. But let not his frailties be remembered; he was a very great man."

XIV

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

EARLY in 1774 a new member, named Edward Gibbon, was admitted to "The Club." His qualifications for this honour were that he had published an *Essai sur l'Etude de la Littérature* (written in French) and that he was known as an historian of vast attainments. He was, in 1774, thirty-seven years old, and was already beginning to show signs of the corpulency which marked him in after-life. His manners were elaborate and formal, and his dress fastidiously precise. At the meetings of "The Club" he spoke seldom, except to make a quiet remark to his neighbour, or to comment in an undertone upon the proceedings of the other members. Several of these asides are recorded by Boswell. On one occasion the talk had turned on wild beasts, and Johnson had begun a monologue on bears, which he continued while the rest of the company carried on a general conversation. "At last, when a pause occurred, Johnson was going on: 'We are told that the black bear is innocent, but I should not like to trust myself with him.' Gibbon muttered in a low tone, 'I should not like to trust myself with *you*.'" We can well imagine that between the great doctor and the great historian there was little affinity, and that each tolerated the other only for the sake of their mutual friends, Sir Joshua Reynolds and Oliver Goldsmith. "The learned Gibbon," says Colman, "was a curious counterbalance to the learned (may I say the less learned) Johnson. Their manners and tastes, both in writing and conversation, were as different as their habiliments. On the day I first sat down with Johnson in his rusty-brown suit and his black worsted stockings, Gibbon was placed opposite to me in a suit of flowered velvet, with a bag and sword. Each had

his measured phraseology, and Johnson's famous parallel between Dryden and Pope might be loosely parodied in reference to himself and Gibbon. Johnson's style was grand, and Gibbon's elegant: the stateliness of the former was sometimes pedantic, and the latter was occasionally finical. Johnson marched to kettledrums and trumpets, Gibbon moved to flutes and hautboys. Johnson hewed passages through the Alps, while Gibbon levelled walks through parks and gardens. Mauled as I had been by Johnson, Gibbon poured balm upon my bruises by condescending once or twice in the course of the evening to talk with me. The great historian was light and playful, suiting his matter to the capacity of the boy: but it was done *more suo*—still his mannerism prevailed, still he tapped his snuff-box, still he smirked and smiled, and rounded his periods with the same air of good-breeding as if he were conversing with men. His mouth mellifluous as Plato's was a round hole nearly in the centre of his visage."

Gibbon had, at the time when he joined "The Club," been two years in London. The death of his father in November 1770 had left him with a small but sufficient fortune, and he was free to live his life as he chose. He took a house in Bentinck Street, Cavendish Square, "bid an everlasting farewell to the country," and with his books, "the most valuable of his effects," came up to town. "I had now," he wrote in his autobiography, "attained the solid comforts of life—a convenient, well-furnished house, a domestic table, a dozen chosen servants, my own carriage, and all those decent luxuries whose value is the more sensibly felt the longer they are enjoyed. These advantages were crowned by the first of earthly blessings, independence. I was the absolute master of my hours and actions; nor was I deceived in the hope that the establishment of my library in town would allow me to divide the day between study and society."

Under such favourable circumstances Gibbon set about the work the idea of which had been in his mind from his earliest youth. In his autobiography he tells how the plan had gradually shaped itself in his mind. He records with

regard to his sickly and studious boyhood, how "as often as I was tolerably exempt from danger and pain, reading, free desultory reading, was the employment and comfort of my solitary hours." "My indiscriminate appetite," he goes on, "subsided by degrees in the *Historic* line." In the summer of 1751 a volume of Echard's Roman history came into his hands. "To me the reigns of the successors of Constantine were absolutely new, and I was immersed in the passage of the Goths over the Danube, when the summons of the dinner-bell reluctantly dragged me from my intellectual feast." The enthusiasm thus aroused drove him on to further study. "Before I was sixteen I had exhausted all that could be learned in English of the Arabs and Persians, the Tartars and Turks; and the same ardour urged me to guess at the French of d'Herbelot, and to construe the barbarous Latin of Pocock's *Abulpharagius*."

This course of study was interrupted when, in 1752, Gibbon was sent to the University. "I arrived at Oxford," he says, "with a stock of erudition that might have puzzled a doctor, and a degree of ignorance of which a schoolboy would have been ashamed," and "I entered on my new life at Magdalen College with surprise and satisfaction." But disappointment soon followed. "The University," he says, "will as gladly renounce me for her son as I shall disclaim her for my mother since I am compelled to acknowledge that the fourteen months which I spent in Magdalen College were totally lost for every purpose of study or improvement." Two years at Lausanne followed the fourteen months at Oxford. At Lausanne Gibbon was under the charge of a French pastor who wisely allowed him to follow his own bent in his studies. The fervour of learning, which the idleness and dissipation of his college career seemed to have cooled, now revived, and he pursued with ardour a course of study of the severest description. These two years were, he acknowledges, among the most fruitful of his life. "Such as I am, in Genius or learning or manners, I owe my creation to Lausanne: it was in that school that the statue was discovered in the block of marble."

In 1758 he returned home, and soon afterward wrote his

Essai sur l'Etude de la Littérature. From 1759 to 1762 he was chiefly occupied by his duties as an officer in the militia. Yet even under these circumstances he managed to maintain a keen interest in literature, and especially in history. He had resolved to write a great historical work, and he spent much time in the attempt to choose a suitable subject. The Crusade of Richard I, the Barons' Wars against John and Henry II, the lives of the Black Prince, Henry V, the Emperor Titus, Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Walter Raleigh, and the history of the Swiss people were successively chosen and rejected.

When the militia was disbanded, toward the close of 1762, Gibbon started on a Continental tour. In 1764 he arrived at the city whose history he was later to tell. "My temper," he says, "is not very susceptible of enthusiasm, and the enthusiasm I do not feel I have ever scorned to affect. But at the distance of twenty-five years I can neither forget nor express the strong emotions which agitated my mind as I first approached and entered the *eternal City*. After a sleepless night, I trod with a lofty step the ruins of the Forum; each memorable spot where Romulus stood, or Tully spoke, or Cæsar fell, was at once present to my eye; and several days of intoxication were lost or enjoyed before I could descend to a cool and minute investigation." He had, as has been said, already determined to write an historical work. "It was the view of Italy and Rome which determined the choice of the subject. In my Journal the place and moment of conception are recorded: It was at Rome, on the fifteenth of October 1764, in the close of evening, as I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted fryars were singing Vespers in the temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the City first started to my mind" but, "though my reading and reflections began to point towards that object, some years elapsed and several avocations intervened before I was seriously engaged in the execution of that laborious work."

The first volume of the history was not begun until Gibbon had settled down in London. Then he set to work in earnest. "At the outset all was dark and doubtful—even the title of

the work, the true era of the decline and fall of the Empire, the limits of the introduction, the division of the chapters and the order of the narrative ; and I was often tempted to cast away the labour of seven years. . . . Three times did I compose the first chapter, and twice the second and third, before I was tolerably satisfied with their effect. In the remainder of the way I advanced with a more equal and easy pace," and in June 1775 the volume was ready for the press. In the meantime Gibbon had entered Parliament, and his duties as a member had somewhat interfered with his literary work.

The first impression of a thousand copies was exhausted in a few days, and a second, third, and fourth edition called for. " My book was on every table, and almost on every toilette ; the historian was crowned by the taste or fashion of the day : nor was the general voice disturbed by the barking of any profane critic. . . ." Gibbon, however, derived most pleasure from the praise given him by the two great historians, David Hume, the first volume of whose *History of England* had been published in 1754, and William Robertson, the author of *The History of Scotland during the Reigns of Mary and James VI*, published 1759. " A letter from Mr Hume," he says, " overpaid the labour of ten years ; but I have never presumed to accept a place in the triumvirate of British historians."

Five more years of steady hard work saw the second and third volumes of the history completed, and carried the story down to the fall of the Roman Empire in the West. This was all that Gibbon had included in his original plan, but after thinking over the matter for about a year he decided to carry on his narrative further and give the history of the Roman Empire established by Constantine in the East, up to the fall of Constantinople in 1453. But he did not immediately take the work in hand. He was growing tired of his life in London and was meditating a change. He had during the two years he had spent at Lausanne formed a friendship with a young Swiss gentleman named Deyverdun, and this friendship had been maintained through all his later life. The two friends now proposed to set up a joint establishment

in Deyverdun's large and commodious house which overlooked the Lake of Geneva. In 1783 the plan was carried out. "Since my establishment at Lausanne," wrote Gibbon, in 1790, "more than seven years have elapsed, and if every day has not been equally soft and serene, not a day, not a moment has occurred in which I have repented of my choice. The hurry of my departure, the joy of my arrival, the delay of my tools suspended the progress of my labours, and a full twelvemonth was lost before I could resume the thread of regular and daily industry." After this interval, however, the work went on rapidly, and by 1787 the sixth volume was finished. "I presumed," says Gibbon, in words which have been quoted so often as to have become familiar to all students, "to mark the moment of conception: I shall now commemorate the hour of my final deliverance. It was on the day, or rather the night, of the 27th of June, 1787, between the hours of eleven and twelve, that I wrote the last lines of the last page in a summer-house in my garden. After laying down my pen, I took several turns in a *berceau*, or covered walk of acacias, which commands a prospect of the country, the lake, and the mountains. The air was temperate, the sky was serene, the silver orb of the moon was reflected from the waters, and all Nature was silent. I will not dissemble the first emotions of joy on the recovery of my freedom, and perhaps the establishment of my fame. But my pride was soon humbled, and a sober melancholy was spread over my mind by the idea that I had taken my everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion, and that, whatsoever might be the future date of my history, the life of the historian must be short and precarious."

The great work was finished; and it is necessary to consider it in its completeness in order to realize how truly great it is. It deals with the greatest event that the history of the world has seen. Gibbon considers the fall of the Roman Empire in all its far-reaching effects on the thought, beliefs, morals, politics and civilization of the world. His narrative covers thirteen centuries and brings us out of the old pagan world, across the great tracts of the Middle

Ages to the borders of that modern world in which we live to-day. We advance with a steady, even movement, without haste or agitation. The great panorama of history is unfolded before us, and scene follows scene in regular succession, each bringing the story a stage further on its way.

The fullness and accuracy which distinguish all parts of Gibbon's vast work have filled his critics with amazement. "That Gibbon should ever be displaced," says Mr Freeman, "seems impossible. . . . We may correct and improve from the stores that have been opened since Gibbon's time; we may write again large parts of his story from other and often truer and more wholesome points of view, but the work of Gibbon as a whole, as the encyclopædic history of 1300 years, as the grandest of historical designs, carried out alike with wonderful power and with wonderful accuracy, must ever keep its place. Whatever else is read, Gibbon must be read too."

In July 1787 Gibbon came to England to superintend the publication of the last three volumes of his work. He returned to Lausanne in 1788, to find his friend Deyverdun in rapidly failing health. In July 1789 Deyverdun died. Gibbon missed him sorely, and never got over his loss. The house by the Lake of Geneva became distasteful to him, though he could not make up his mind to leave it. He attempted no more work, and even his books were neglected. The great Revolution, then proceeding in France, filled him with alarm and horror. Soon his health began to fail, and for months at a time he was helpless with gout. Want of exercise and indulgence in unsuitable diet had made him a marvel of unwieldy corpulence. Yet he bore his ills with the cheerfulness of a philosopher, and tried hard to maintain his enjoyment of the good things within his grasp. But soon still heavier troubles fell. Friend after friend was lost to him by death, and when at last he heard that the wife of Lord Sheffield, with whom he had "for years lived on terms of the most affectionate intimacy," was dead, Gibbon suddenly resolved to go to England to attempt to console his friend. To a man in his state of health the journey was a difficult and a dangerous

one, but he accomplished it in safety. He spent the summer with Lord Sheffield, and seemed to be rather better than he had been at Lausanne. But toward the end of the year he was attacked by the illness which soon brought him to his end. He died on January 16, 1794.

XV

THE POEMS OF ROBERT BURNS

AT the beginning of the year 1759 there stood on the road that leads from the town of Ayr to the banks of the "bonnie Doon" a small clay-built cottage. William Burness, a poor Scottish gardener, had built it with his own hands as a home for himself and his wife; and on January 25, 1759, in the midst of a wild and stormy winter, was born there their eldest son, Robert. "No wonder," he used to say in after-life, "that one ushered into the world amid such a tempest should be the victim of stormy passions."

In the "auld clay biggin" Robert grew up from infancy to childhood. The home was a poor one, but he, with the brothers and sisters who came later to join him in the little cottage, were not therefore to be pitied. They grew up hearty and strong on "halesome parritch, chief o' Scotia's food": they had a careful, tender mother, and a father whom they remembered and spoke of with pride all their lives long. He was one of those peasant-saints who are Scotland's glory, and the fervour of his religious feeling ennobled every act of his hard and toilsome life. He was sober, frugal, and industrious, with keen intellectual powers and a reverence for learning which made him eager to give his sons every educational advantage that he could possibly obtain for them.

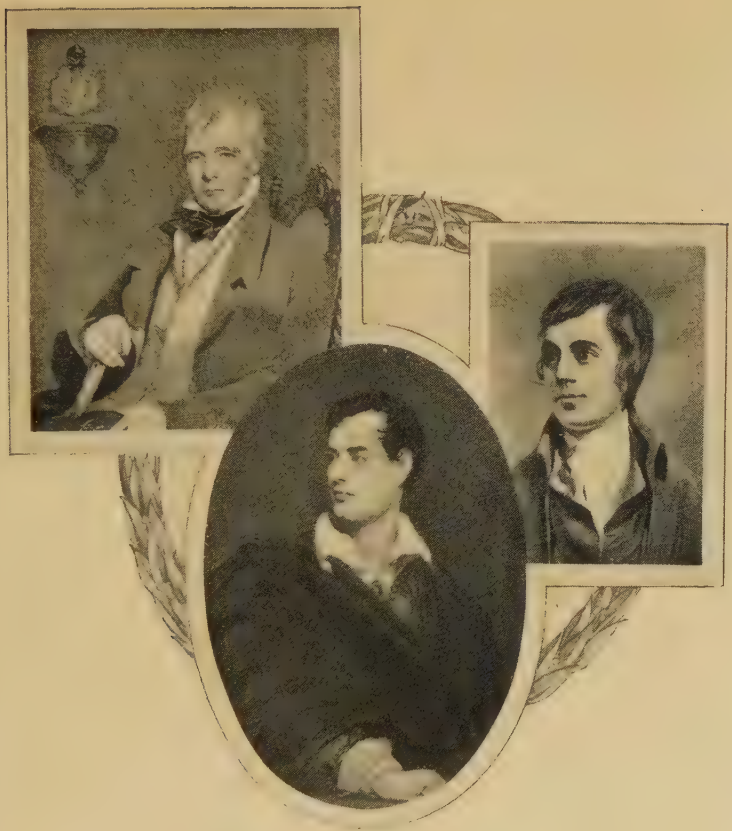
When Robert was nearly seven years old the family removed to a small farm at Mount Oliphant, about two miles from the Brig o' Doon. William Burness hoped to improve his poor fortunes by turning from gardening to farming. But the venture was an unlucky one. The most severe toil and rigid economy were necessary to wring a living from the unproductive soil. Robert and his brother Gilbert were

forced to give their help, and while they were yet growing boys they worked like men. The good father grew old and careworn in the struggle, but he still gave anxious thought to the education of his boys. He and four of his neighbours engaged a young schoolmaster, named Murdoch, who boarded with each family in turn, and received a small salary for teaching their children. When the schoolmaster left William Burness taught his children himself, giving to them the evening hours he sorely needed for rest. In this way the boys received a sound and thorough Scottish education. "Nothing," says Gilbert Burns, in an account which he wrote later of the early life of his celebrated brother, "could be more retired than our general manner of living; we rarely saw anybody but the members of our own family. . . . My father was for some time almost the only companion we had. He conversed familiarly on all subjects with us, as if we had been men; and was at great pains, as we accompanied him in the labours of the farm, to lead the conversation to such subjects as might tend to increase our knowledge, or confirm us in virtuous habits. He borrowed Salmon's *Geographical Grammar* for us, and endeavoured to make us acquainted with the situation and history of the different countries in the world; while, from a book society in Ayr, he procured for us the reading of Derham's *Physico- and Astro-Theology*, and Ray's *Wisdom of God in the Creation*, to give us some idea of astronomy and natural history. Robert read all these books with an avidity and industry scarcely to be equalled. My father had been a subscriber to Stackhouse's *History of the Bible*. From this Robert collected a competent knowledge of ancient history; for no book was so voluminous as to slacken his industry, or so antiquated as to damp his researches." Other books which Robert himself speaks of having read at this time are the *Life of Hannibal*, *The History of Sir William Wallace*, some odd numbers of *The Spectator*, some of Shakespeare's plays, Pope's works, including his translation of Homer, Locke on the *Human Understanding*, Richardson's *Pamela*, and Allan Ramsay's *Poems*. These are not the books we should expect to find in the house of a poor farmer, but the Burness family were, one and all, eager and

intelligent readers. A visitor coming into the farmhouse of Mount Oliphant one day at dinner-time, found the whole family seated with a spoon in one hand and a book in the other. Many a wealthy home in Edinburgh had less of the true spirit of culture than was to be found in the poor farmhouse of William Burness; and side by side with this dwelt the spirit of lovingkindness, of tender family affection, of reverence for all things holy and all things pure.

In such an atmosphere Robert Burns grew up; and though he had many hardships to bear, though hard and constant toil and meagre food told on his health, though he had but a scanty wage and few pleasures, his boyhood and youth cannot have been so altogether unhappy as some of his biographers have represented it. Probably he thought himself unhappier than he really was, for his nature was hot and passionate, and he longed for the prizes and the pleasures of the great world which lay beyond the bare moors that surrounded his home. Very early he began to find some relief for his feelings in poetry. When he was about sixteen he came across a book called *A Select Collection of English Songs*, which he seized upon with eagerness. Already he knew most of the songs of Allan Ramsay by heart, and this new collection was like a great store of gold added to his treasure. "I pored over them," he says, "driving my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noting the true, tender or sublime, from affectation and fustian. I am convinced I owe to this practice much of my critic-craft, such as it is."

In 1777 the Burness family moved to a better farm on the north bank of the river Ayr, and things became a little more prosperous. It was at this farm of Lochlea that Robert's song-writing, at which he had before made some attempts, began to show the fine qualities which distinguish his greatest efforts. Most of his songs were love-songs, for Robert, throughout his life, was most susceptible to the inspiration given by love. "My heart," he says, "was completely tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some goddess or another." His bright, glowing eyes, gallant manner, and



Sir Walter Scott — C. R. Leslie, R.A.

Lord Byron — Thomas Phillips, R.A.

Robert Burns — A. Nasmyth

Photo Emery Walker, Ltd.

ready tongue, made him a favourite with all the lasses round about his home, and several of these he celebrated in his early verses.

My Nanie's charming, sweet, an' young;
Nae artfu' wiles to win ye, O:
May ill befa' the flattering tongue
That wad beguile my Nanie, O.

Her face is fair, her heart is true
As spotless as she's bonie, O:
The op'ning gowan, wat wi' dew,
Nae purer is than Nanie, O.

It was not only among the lasses, however, that Robert was popular. His brother Gilbert used to "recall with delight the days when they had to go with one or two companions to cut peats for the winter fuel, because Robert was sure to enliven their toil with a rattling fire of witty remarks on men and things, mingled with the expressions of a genial, glowing heart, and the whole perfectly free from the taint which he afterwards acquired from his contact with the world. Not even in those volumes which afterward charmed his country from end to end, did Gilbert see his brother in so interesting a light as in these conversations in the bog, with only two or three noteless peasants for an audience."

The brilliant gifts that made Robert the centre of interest wherever he went led him at last into temptation which he was unable to resist. In the summer of 1781 he and his brother Gilbert went to the town of Irvine, to learn flax-dressing. Here Robert fell in with some wild companions, who exercised a strong influence upon him. The teaching of his home was, for a time, forgotten. He shared the irregular and dissipated life of his new acquaintances, and learnt to look upon the religion of his father as antiquated and illiberal, and to pride himself upon his emancipation from beliefs which now seemed to him cramping prejudices. The effect of this stay at Irvine was to change the character of his life. Henceforward the deterioration was slow, but steady, though

it was interrupted by fits of deep and sincere penitence and earnest resolutions of amendment.

In 1784 William Burness died, troubled, as we read, upon his deathbed with fears for the future of his eldest son, whose brilliant genius and weak moral nature he had early recognized. Robert felt his father's loss acutely, and made many resolutions to be steady and industrious, the mainstay of his widowed mother and his sisters. But the ill-success of a farming experiment which he made in partnership with his brother Gilbert disheartened him, and in the recklessness of his disappointment he returned to his old evil habits. The poems written during this period show clearly how far he had drifted from the godly teaching and the noble ideals of his dead father. Personal ill-feeling against his own parish minister led him to make a fierce attack upon the Church as a whole, and in a series of poems—*The Twa Herds*, *Holy Willie's Prayer*, *The Ordination*, and *The Holy Fair*—he used all his powers of wit and sarcasm against the clergy of that party known in Scotland as the Auld Lights. It has been said that Burns attacked not the Church, but its abuses, and this, to a certain extent, is true. But he did his work so recklessly, was so careless in his handling of holy things, and showed altogether such a want of reverence, and even of decency, that the poems served to increase his already bad reputation even while they raised his poetic fame.

Yet almost at the time that he was writing them he was meditating that beautiful tribute to his father's religion which he enshrined in his *Cotter's Saturday Night*, and was experiencing those patriotic heart-stirrings which made him long to do something for the country of which he was so proud. In him pure and lofty impulses, though they could not overcome the temptations that debased him, could not be themselves overcome. "Obscure I am, obscure I must be," he wrote in his commonplace book, August 1784, "though no young poet nor young soldier's heart ever beat more fondly for fame than mine," and, at a later date in his career, he expressed the feelings that at this time possessed him still more finely in verse :

E'en then a wish, I mind its power,
A wish that to my latest hour
Shall strongly heave my breast,
That I for poor Auld Scotland's sake
Some usefu' plan or beuk could make,
Or sing a song at least.

The years 1784–86, which were marked by the rapid deterioration of the poet's moral character, were marked also by the production of some of his finest verse. The two well-known lyrics *To a Mouse* and *To a Mountain Daisy* were suggested by the incidents of his daily work. Two love affairs, both unfortunate, inspired respectively the lovely songs, *Of a' the Airts the Wind can blaw*, and *Highland Mary*. These, and many others, were written in the garret bedroom which Robert shared with his brother Gilbert. "The farmhouse of Mossgiel," says his biographer, Chambers, "which still exists almost unchanged since the days of the poet, is very small, consisting of only two rooms, a but and a ben, as they are called in Scotland. Over these, reached by a trap stair, is a small garret, in which Robert and his brother used to sleep. Thither, when he had returned from his day's work, the poet used to retire, and seat himself at a small deal table, lighted by a narrow skylight in the roof, to transcribe the verses which he had composed in the fields. His favourite time for composition was at the plough. Long years afterward his sister, Mrs Begg, used to tell how when her brother had gone forth again to field-work, she would steal up to the garret and search the drawer of the deal table for the verses which Robert had newly transcribed."

By 1786 Burns had given up all hope of making his farming a success. Life at Mossgiel had become intolerable to him. His conduct had been openly censured by the minister; his neighbours regarded him as a reprobate of the worst kind; "Highland Mary," whom he seems to have truly loved, was dead; to his other love, Jean Armour, he had been cruel and faithless. "I have been," Burns wrote to one of his friends, "for some time pining under secret wretchedness, from causes which you pretty well know—the pang of disappointment, the sting of pride, with some wandering stabs of

remorse, which never fail to settle on my vitals like vultures, when attention is not called away by the calls of society or the vagaries of the Muse. Even in the hour of social mirth, my gaiety is the madness of an intoxicated criminal under the hands of the executioner."

The only means of escape seemed to lie in leaving Scotland for a distant country. After some time spent in fruitless efforts to arrange this, Burns at last obtained a post as overseer on a negro plantation in Jamaica. In order to raise money for the expenses of the voyage, he resolved to publish his poems by subscription. In July 1786 the book was issued by a printer of Kilmarnock, and it at once made Burns famous. "Old and young, high and low, grave and gay, learned or ignorant, were alike delighted, agitated, transported. . . . Ploughboys and maidservants would have gladly bestowed the wages they earned most hardly and which they wanted to purchase necessary clothing, if they might procure the works of Burns." The fame of the book reached Edinburgh, at this time a great centre of culture, and many of the prominent men gathered there felt a strong desire to see the Ayrshire ploughman who had written so wonderfully. One of these, Dugald Stewart, Professor of Moral Philosophy, whose classes at Edinburgh University young Walter Scott was at that time attending, had already met Burns in Ayrshire, and had been delighted with his manly, modest bearing and good sense no less than with his poetry. The blind poet, Dr Blacklock, who also belonged to the innermost circle of Edinburgh's learned men, was enthusiastic in his praise of the Kilmarnock volume. A letter written by him came into Burns's hands, and this it was, as he tells us, that overthrew all his schemes by opening up new prospects to his poetic ambition.

The voyage to Jamaica was given up, and Burns resolved to try his fortune in Edinburgh. His two days' journey thither was like a triumphal progress; at each inn on the road admirers gathered and gave him the heartiest reception. Arrived in Edinburgh he settled at the house of a humble friend from Ayrshire, but soon the great men of the city found him out. Burns became the lion of Edinburgh society.

Every house opened to him. The Earl of Glencairn met him in a spirit of kindliest friendship; the Duchess of Gordon and other ladies of the highest rank and fashion declared that his conversation "took them off their feet." The great lights of the legal profession, which formed so important a part of Edinburgh society, treated him with the greatest respect and consideration. Through all this adulation Burns's native good sense bore him with safety and dignity. He never pretended to be other than he was. He wore the dress suited to his class, a suit of blue and buff, with buckskins and topped boots, in which he looked like a farmer in his Sunday best. He never condescended to flatter the great lords and ladies who gathered round him, and he made it quite clear by his behaviour that he accepted their hospitality as offered not to an inferior, but to an equal.

The most interesting incident connected with this Edinburgh visit was the meeting between Burns and Walter Scott, who was then a lad of fifteen. They met at the house of Professor Fergusson, and Scott has recorded his impression of the elder poet. "His person was strong and robust; his manners rustic, not clownish; a sort of dignified plainness and simplicity, which received part of its effect perhaps from one's knowledge of his extraordinary talents. . . . I would have taken the poet, had I not known what he was, for a very sagacious country farmer of the old Scotch school—the '*douce gudeman*,' who held his own plough. There was a strong expression of sense and shrewdness in all his lineaments; the eye alone, I think, indicated the poetical character and temperament. It was large, and of a dark cast, and glowed (I say literally *glowed*) when he spoke with feeling or interest. I never saw such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men in my time."

A new edition of the poems was published in April 1787. The list of subscribers included many of the most famous names in Scotland. From the Kilmarnock edition he had received twenty pounds; the proceeds of the Edinburgh volume exceeded five hundred pounds. To Burns this was a fortune, and, wisely applied, might have laid the foundation of a lasting prosperity. Some of it he spent on tours in the

Highlands which occupied the rest of the year 1787. He gave one hundred and eighty pounds to his brother Gilbert, and with what was left he bought and stocked the farm of Ellisland, in Nithsdale, near Dumfries. In April 1788 he was reconciled to, and married, Jean Armour, and the two began their life at Ellisland.

But the new farming venture was no more successful than the old had been. Habits of dissipation had taken a strong hold on Burns, and he was incapable of the steady regular application which his position required. His farm-hands followed their master's example and spent much of their time in idleness and merry-making. The family depended mainly on Burns's salary as an excise officer, an appointment given to him through the influence of some of his Edinburgh friends. Its duties took him constantly away from his home, and increased his unsettled habits. His fame attracted many visitors to the neighbourhood of Ellisland, and messengers were often sent to the farm asking him to dine with his admirers at some neighbouring tavern. Then followed a night of merry-making and days of repentant misery. Poor, meek Jean Armour and her children had but a sorry time; life at Ellisland had now few of the "golden days" to which the poet had looked forward when, in the summer of 1788, he had journeyed through the beautiful and romantic scenery of Nithsdale to his new farm like "a May-frog, leaping across the newly harrowed ridge."

The darkening, anxious years, however, saw a revival of Burns's poetic energy. Throughout the brilliant Edinburgh period he had written nothing, and even the lovely scenery of the Highlands had afforded no inspiration. But now songs came readily and quickly. Some were drinking songs like the inimitable

> O, Willie brewed a peck o' maut,
> And Rob and Allan cam to see;
> Three blyther hearts, that lee-lang night
> Ye wad na found in Christendie,

which commemorated a merry meeting between Burns and his friends Allan Masterton and William Nicol. Some are

sad and tender, like the lovely lyrics in memory of the never-forgotten "Highland Mary." On the anniversary of her death Burns wrote:

Thou ling'ring star, with less'ning ray,
That lov'st to greet the early morn,
Again thou usherest in the day
My Mary from my soul was torn.
O Mary! dear departed shade!
Where is thy place of blissful rest?
Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?

Other Ellisland songs are *John Anderson my Jo, John, Auld Lang Syne, The Silver Tassie,* and *The Banks o' Doon.* Burns meditated writing a great dramatic work, but the sustained effort necessary for this was beyond his powers. His longest poem, and one of his finest, was the tale of *Tam o' Shanter,* composed, as he tells us, in a state of joyful excitement one day in the autumn of 1790.

By 1791 Burns had resolved to leave Ellisland, and in August the sale of the farm took place and the family moved to Dumfries. The history of the poet's life in his town home is a history of continued deterioration, though his poetic genius shone almost as brightly as ever. The years between 1791 and 1796 saw the production of *Ae Fond Kiss, O my Luve's like a Red, Red Rose, O wert Thou in the Cauld Blast, She is a Winsome Wee Thing, Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled,* and the fine *A Man's a Man for a' That.*

Is there, for honest poverty,
That hangs his head, and a' that?
The coward-slave, we pass him by,
We dare be poor for a' that!
For a' that, and a' that,
Our toils obscure, and a' that;
The rank is but the guinea stamp;
The man's the gowd for a' that.

Toward the end of 1795 the poet's health began to fail. Hard drinking and constant excitement brought their natural results, and when in January 1796, after a long carouse, he fell asleep in the open air on a bitter winter's night, his enfeebled

frame was unable to recover from the effects of the exposure. Rheumatic fever set in, and after an illness of some months Robert Burns died, on July 21, 1796. In his own *Bard's Epitaph*, written ten years before, he had provided the words in which his career can best be summed up and its moral read:

The poor inhabitant below
Was quick to learn, and wise to know,
And keenly felt the friendly glow,
And softer flame;
But thoughtless follies laid him low,
And stained his name.

Reader, attend! Whether thy soul
Soars fancy's flight beyond the pole,
Or darkening grubs this earthly hole,
In low pursuit;
Know, prudent, cautious self control
Is wisdom's root.

XVI

THE LYRICAL BALLADS

A NEW spirit in English poetry had gathered strength through the works of such men as Thomson, Collins, Gray, Chatterton, Blake, Cowper, and Burns. We come now to the two poets in whom it found its fullest and most perfect development—William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. These two, who were to join in producing a book that marks a new era in the history of English poetry, were born and bred at opposite ends of England—Wordsworth in the northern Lake District, and Coleridge in the beautiful southern county that has given us so many famous Englishmen — the county of Devon. Wordsworth, the elder by two years, came of a family long settled in Westmorland and was himself, throughout his life, a dalesman in sympathy and habits. He had the same home-loving nature, shrewd simplicity and unbending pride that characterized his poorer neighbours, and he never acquired that superficial polish which sometimes obscures native qualities. When he was in his fourteenth year his father died, and William was left to the care of his two uncles. All his schooldays were spent in Westmorland, and in his autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, he tells what the beauty of the surrounding country did for him in his boyish years:

> What spring and autumn, what the winter snows,
> And what the summer shade, what day and night,
> Evening and morning, sleep and waking, thought
> From sources inexhaustible, poured forth
> To feed the spirit of religious love
> In which I walked with Nature.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Ye mountains, and ye lakes
> And sounding cataracts, ye mists and winds

That dwell among the hills where I was born,
If in my youth I have been pure in heart,
If, mingling with the world, I am content
With my own modest pleasures, and have lived,
With God and Nature communing, removed
From little enmities and low desires . . .
The gift is yours.
. . . 'Tis yours,
Ye mountains! thine, O Nature! Thou hast fed
My lofty speculations; and in thee,
For this uneasy heart of ours, I find
A never-failing principle of joy
And purest passion.

Cowper and Burns loved Nature, but the love could not sustain and comfort Cowper, or ennoble the life of Burns. For Wordsworth it could, and did, do both these things. For him Nature had not only a fair and beautiful body, but a great informing soul. Other poets, it is true, from the time of Milton, had recognized that behind the beauty of the world was the spirit of God, working, creating, and sustaining. But to none had this truth come home with the force and intimacy that it came to Wordsworth. No poet before him had seen in Nature the special medium through which God communicates with His people—teaches them, guides them, reproves, and encourages them. Wordsworth loved a flower, not primarily because it was beautiful in colour and in form, or because it was wonderfully made, but because he saw in it a spark of the Divine spirit that claimed his reverence; the glory of the messenger was lost in the greater glory of the message. It is this feeling which gives to Wordsworth's poetry its characteristic value, and it is this which causes him to deal in so many of his poems with subjects that may seem common and even mean. For him nothing was mean, for in all was the spirit of God.

Meanwhile, Coleridge, too, was being shaped for his life's work. He was the son of the vicar of Ottery St Mary, and the youngest of a family of thirteen. From his earliest years he was a marvellously precocious child. "I never played," he says, "except by myself, and then only acting over what I had been reading or fancying, or half one and half the other, cutting down weeds and nettles with a stick, as one of the

seven champions of Christendom. Alas! I had all the simplicity, all the docility of the little child, but none of the child's habits. I never thought as a child—never had the language of a child." Before he was ten years old he wrote verses which were surprisingly good for a child of his age. At ten he left the quiet Devonshire village, and came up to London to Christ's Hospital. Here, as part of his school course, he studied the works of the great English poets closely and minutely, under the guidance of "a very sensible though at the same time a very severe master." He became, as he tells us, above par in English versification, and produced two or three compositions "somewhat above mediocrity." But soon he was drawn from the study of poetry by another pursuit that took entire possession of him. "At a very premature age, even before my fifteenth year, I had bewildered myself in metaphysics, and in theological controversy. Nothing else pleased me. History, and particular facts, lost all interest in my mind. . . . Poetry itself, yea novels and romances, became insipid to me." Charles Lamb, who was Coleridge's schoolfellow at Christ's Hospital, describes some occasions upon which the tall, commanding-looking schoolboy with his long black hair and pale face, astonished all his hearers by his eloquence. "How have I seen," writes Lamb, "the casual passer through the cloisters stand still, entranced with admiration (while he weighed the disproportion between the speech and the garb of the young Mirandula), to hear thee unfold in thy deep and sweet intonations the mysteries of Iamblichus or Plotinus (for even in those years thou waxedst not pale at such philosophic draughts) or reciting Homer in the Greek, or Pindar, while the walls of the old Grey Friars re-echoed with the accents of the *inspired charity-boy*."

From this preoccupation in metaphysics Coleridge was recalled by reading the sonnets of William Lisle Bowles, a minor poet of the day. These sonnets are fresh and natural, but show no great poetic power, and it is difficult to see why they should have exerted so powerful an influence over such a nature as Coleridge's. He was, he tells us, "enthusiastically delighted and inspired" by these poems, and through their

influence he resumed the practice of poetical composition, which he had for several years neglected.

When Coleridge went up to Jesus College, Cambridge, in 1791, Wordsworth was just leaving St John's College of the same university. The three years he had spent there had given him a fresh store of beautiful mental images, but in all other respects he had changed little. His appearance was still heavy and somewhat rustic, his manner reserved and austere. The intense inner life of communion with Nature, of which in his boyhood he had become so keenly conscious, had strengthened with the years, and his inclination toward a life of studious retirement had strengthened too. It was necessary, however, that he should do something to earn his own living, for over the choice of a profession he lingered and hesitated. For a few months he lived in London, wandering about its streets and meditating on his career; toward the end of the year he went to France, meaning to spend the winter in learning the French language. Here he found himself in the midst of the great Revolution movement of which, at home, he had calmly and temperately approved. But his lukewarmness changed to a burning enthusiasm when he met and talked with some of those ardent spirits to whom the Revolution seemed the hope of the world. He dreamed, indeed, of taking an active part as a leader in the great movement; but his friends at home grew alarmed, his allowance was stopped, and very unwillingly he returned to England at the end of 1792.

But the ideals of the Revolution still possessed him, and he watched with passionate interest the course which affairs were taking in France. The excesses of its later stages, and more especially the murder of the King, shook his belief in the moral grandeur and regenerating power of the movement. Lower and lower sank his hopes through the terrible years that followed his return to England, until at last came the agonizing realization that it was no reign of Universal Brotherhood that was dawning on the world, but a reign of tyranny and selfish lust of power. For a time he lost heart and hope. He saw man as a being unable to tell good from evil, loyal to no law that might deliver him from his lower

self, but ever driven unresisting "as selfish passion urged" until he became "the dupe of folly, or the slave of crime." It was only very slowly that this mood of despair passed from him. When his soul had reached its "last and lowest ebb,"

> Then it was—
> Thanks to the bounteous Giver of all good!—
> That the belovèd Sister in whose sight
> Those days were passed. . . .
> Maintained for me a saving intercourse
> With my true self; . . .
> She whispered still that brightness would return,
> She, in the midst of all, preserved me still
> A Poet, made me seek beneath that name,
> And that alone, my office upon earth;
> . . . Nature's self
> By all varieties of human love
> Assisted, led me back through opening day
> To those sweet counsels between head and heart
> Whence grew that genuine knowledge, fraught with peace,
> Which, through the later sinkings of this cause,
> Hath still upheld me, and upholds me now.

This was the greatest spiritual crisis through which Wordsworth ever passed. His sister Dorothy, who had helped him in his need, was from this time forward the poet's constant companion. She was, in feeling, as true a poet as he himself was. Her nature was singularly ardent and affectionate and her devotion to her brother was complete. She guarded him, as far as was in her power, from worldly cares and troubles, and made the life of studious leisure for which he longed possible for him. Wordsworth loved his sister tenderly, and over and over again in his poems acknowledged the deep debt he owed her.

The plan of living together in some simple country cottage had been in the minds of the two for several years before a fortunate circumstance made it possible. A friend and admirer of Wordsworth's, Mr Raisley Calvert, left him, in 1794, a legacy of nine hundred pounds. This he laid out in an annuity, upon which the frugal management of Dorothy Wordsworth made it possible for the two to live. They

settled down in a cottage at Racedown, in Dorsetshire, and Wordsworth began in earnest his poetic career. It was at Racedown that the memorable friendship with Coleridge began.

The years which had been so bare of actual events and so full of spiritual experiences for Wordsworth had brought great changes to Coleridge. He had taken up his university life with some enthusiasm, though his method of study was "desultory and capricious." "His room was a constant rendezvous for conversation-loving friends" who felt astonishment similar to that of his Christ's Hospital associates at his wonderful powers of declamation. In 1793 Coleridge, through troubles connected either with love or with money, suddenly disappeared from the University and enlisted as a private in the Light Dragoons under the name of Silas Titus Comberbach (S.T.C.). After four months, his scholarship having been discovered by one of the officers, he was bought out by his friends, and was allowed to return to Cambridge. In 1794, during a visit to Oxford, he met Robert Southey, the poet. Coleridge was at this time possessed, as Wordsworth had been, by the ideals of the French Revolution. His republican passion was far more violent than that of the steadier, sounder-natured Wordsworth, and led him into all kinds of wild and impracticable projects. He was in a state of mind that made him quite ready to take up with enthusiasm the ideas that were at that time occupying the minds of Southey and his friend Robert Lovell. The two had married sisters, Mary and Edith Fricker, and designed, with them, to form a community on the banks of the Susquehanna, which community should be a perfect society of kindred souls, who should have all things in common. The name they gave to the doctrine on which this scheme was based was Pantisocrasy. Coleridge at once became an ardent Pantisocrat. He engaged himself to the third sister of the Fricker family, Sarah, induced, as some say, by genuine passion, or, as is held by others, by a misguided impulse. The great scheme was never realized, owing chiefly to lack of funds, but it had a considerable influence on Coleridge's development. He began at this time his part of the drama, *The Fall of Robespierre,* to which Southey and Lovell also

contributed, and he delivered a series of lectures on the French Revolution, at Bristol. His enthusiasm for the Revolution, however, soon began to cool; as it had been more violent than that of Wordsworth, so its effects were less lasting. A new scheme now occupied him. In October 1795 he married Miss Sarah Fricker, and the two settled down in a cottage at Clevedon, amid the most beautiful scenery, and within sound of the sea. There was about an acre and a half of ground attached to the cottage, and this Coleridge designed to cultivate, and to support himself and his wife on the produce. They were to live in the simplest fashion, with no servant and no society. Three happy months seem to have followed, and the poem, *The Æolian Harp*, which Coleridge wrote at this time, breathes the very spirit of joy:

> Methinks, it should have been impossible
> Not to love all things in a world so filled;
> Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air
> Is Music slumbering on her instrument.

But, as might have been expected, money soon began to fail, and Coleridge found himself obliged to turn once more to literary work for a means of living. He wrote many poems filled, all of them, with the ardour and extravagance of his hot youth, and these, with his earlier verses, were collected and published in 1797. In 1796 he essayed journalism, and planned the publication of a paper for the propagation of the ideas that possessed him. The paper was to be called *The Watchman*, and was to advocate Universal Liberty, Unitarianism, and a vast number of other doctrines connected with religion, politics, and education. Coleridge's account, in his *Biographia Literaria*, of the tour which he made in the north of England for the purpose of gaining subscribers to his paper is a most delightful piece of finely humorous writing. The project, it is scarcely necessary to say, failed completely.

Early in 1797 Coleridge removed to a cottage at Nether Stowey, in Somersetshire, which a friend and admirer of his genius, Mr Thomas Poole, had placed at his disposal. Here

he was visited by Charles and Mary Lamb, and from here he started on his own memorable visit to the Wordsworths, walking from Nether Stowey by Bridgewater to Racedown. He had for some years been an enthusiastic admirer of Wordsworth's poems, and personal acquaintance ripened this admiration into affection. Coleridge soon formed a close friendship with Wordsworth and with his "exquisite sister." Dorothy Wordsworth's impressions of this new friend must be given in her own words: "He is a wonderful man. His conversation teems with soul, mind, and spirit. Then he is so benevolent, so good-tempered and cheerful, and, like William, interests himself so much about every little trifle. At first I thought him very plain, that is, for about three minutes; he is pale, thin, has a wide mouth, thick lips, and not very good teeth, longish, loose-growing, half-curling rough black hair. But if you hear him speak for five minutes you think no more of them. His eye is large and full, and not very dark but grey, such an eye as would receive from an heavy soul the dullest expression; but it speaks every emotion of his animated mind: he has more of the poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling than I ever witnessed. He has fine dark eyebrows and an overhanging forehead."

The Wordsworths soon learnt to set so high a value on the company of their new friend, that they gave up their house at Racedown, and removed to Alfoxden, near Nether Stowey. Here, for twelve months the two poets were in constant association. They wandered together over the beautiful Quantock Hills, which Dorothy Wordsworth, who often made one of the party, has so finely described in her *Journal*. "Our conversations," Coleridge tells us, "turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination." "In this idea," he goes on, "originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads*; in which it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic. . . Mr Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to

himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us." Wordsworth takes up the tale, and tells us how the details of the plan were originated and worked out. "In the autumn of 1797, Mr Coleridge, my sister and myself started from Alfoxden pretty late in the afternoon, with a view to visit Linton and the Valley of Stones near to it; and as our united funds were very small, we agreed to defray the expense of the tour by writing a poem to be sent to *The New Monthly Magazine*. In the course of this walk was planned the poem of *The Ancient Mariner*, founded on a dream, as Mr Coleridge said, of his friend Mr Cruikshank. Much the greatest part of the story was Mr Coleridge's invention; but certain parts I suggested; for example, some crime was to be committed which was to bring upon the Old Navigator, as Coleridge afterward delighted to call him, the spectral persecution, as a consequence of that crime and his own wanderings. I had been reading in Shelvocke's *Voyages*, a day or two before, that, while doubling Cape Horn they frequently saw albatrosses in that latitude, the largest sort of sea-fowl, some extending their wings twelve or thirteen feet. 'Suppose,' said I, 'you represent him as having killed one of these birds on entering the South Sea, and that the tutelary spirits of these regions take upon them to avenge the crime.' The incident was thought fit for the purpose, and adopted accordingly. I also suggested the navigation of the ship by the dead men, but do not recollect that I had anything more to do with the scheme of the poem. We began the composition together, on that, to me, memorable evening. I furnished two or three lines at the beginning of the poem, in particular:

> And listened like a three years' child;
> The Mariner had his will.

As we endeavoured to proceed conjointly our respective manners proved so widely different, that it would have been quite presumptuous in me to do anything but separate from

an undertaking upon which I could only have been a clog. *The Ancient Mariner* grew and grew, till it became too important for our first object, which was limited to our expectation of five pounds; and we began to think of a volume, which was to consist, as Mr Coleridge has told the world, of poems, chiefly on supernatural subjects, taken from common life, but looked at, as much as might be, through an imaginative medium."

It would appear from this that the division of the work, as given by Coleridge, was a development of the original plan; but when the different portions were assigned each poet proceeded rapidly. Coleridge finished *The Ancient Mariner*, that wonderful poem which is unlike anything else in the English language, including all the other works of Coleridge himself. It shows all his wonderful imaginative power, together with a simplicity and restraint which is not usual in his works, and for which, perhaps, he has to thank the influence of Wordsworth.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner was Coleridge's great contribution to the *Lyrical Ballads*. "I was preparing," he tells us, "among other poems, *The Dark Ladie* and the *Christabel*, in which I should have more nearly realized my ideal than I had done in my first attempt. But Mr Wordsworth's industry had proved so much more successful, and the number of his poems so much greater, that my compositions, instead of forming a balance, appeared rather an interpolation of heterogeneous matter." The *Lyrical Ballads*, in its first edition, contained nineteen poems by Wordsworth, and only four by Coleridge, but, the one contribution of *The Ancient Mariner* gave the less prolific writer a fair claim to the title of partner in the work.

Of the poems contributed by Wordsworth to the *Lyrical Ballads* he tells us many interesting particulars in the notes prefaced to later editions of his works. They seem to have been composed in Wordsworth's happiest mood, not laboriously, as tasks, but in a spirit of pure enjoyment. "This long poem," Wordsworth writes of *The Idiot Boy*, "was composed in the groves of Alfoxden, almost extempore; not a word, I believe, being corrected, though one stanza

was omitted. I mention this in gratitude to those happy moments, for, in truth, I never wrote anything with so much glee." Often a particular poem, before it was put aside as finished, was read aloud to Dorothy Wordsworth and Coleridge, for their criticism. Of *We are Seven* Wordsworth tells us, " When it was all but finished, I came in and recited it to Mr Coleridge and my sister, and said, ' A preparatory stanza must be added, and I should sit down to our little tea-meal with greater pleasure if my task were finished.' I mentioned in substance what I wished to be expressed, and Coleridge immediately threw off the stanza thus:

A little child, dear brother Jem,—

I objected to the rhyme ' dear brother Jem ' as being ludicrous, but we all enjoyed the joke of hitching in our friend James T——'s name, who was familiarly called Jem. . . . The said Jem got a sight of the *Lyrical Ballads* as it was going through the press at Bristol, during which time I was residing in that city. One evening he came to me with a grave face, and said: ' Wordsworth, I have seen the volume that Coleridge and you are about to publish. There is one poem in it which I earnestly entreat you will cancel, for, if published, it will make you everlastingly ridiculous.' I answered that I felt much obliged by the interest he took in my good name as a writer, and begged to know what was the unfortunate piece he alluded to. He said: ' It is called *We are Seven.*' ' Nay,' said I, ' that shall take its chance, however,' and he left me in despair."

The criticism of this friend anticipated the criticism which *We are Seven*, with several other of Wordsworth's poems was to receive when the *Lyrical Ballads* were published in the autumn of 1798. The style and language of these poems were entirely new to a public accustomed to the polished, artificial verse of Pope and his followers. " Innocent and pretty infantile prattle," one reviewer called *We are Seven*, and *The Thorn*, *Goody Blake*, and *The Idiot Boy* received still harsher condemnation. Wordsworth, however, maintained and defended his position. In a second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800, he inserted a preface, in which he set out at

length the reasons which had guided him in his choice of subjects and of language. "Humble and rustic life was generally chosen," he says, "because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language." "My purpose was to imitate and as far as possible to adopt the very language of men." "There will be found in these volumes little of what is usually called poetic diction, as much pains has been taken to avoid it as is usually taken to produce it." "It may be safely affirmed that there neither is, nor can be, any *essential* difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." These quotations from Wordsworth's lengthy argument set forward the principles to which he consistently held during the whole of his poetical career. Neither ridicule nor monetary loss—both of which he suffered in no common degree—could induce him to recant. The theory of poetic writing to which he thus stubbornly held was, doubtless, in many respects faulty; and to it are due those flat stretches of bald, prosaic verse which the most devoted Wordsworthian finds himself unable to defend. But the very exaggeration of his views helped him to do his part in bringing about the revolution in poetic taste which marked the early part of the nineteenth century.

But when we have acknowledged these lapses, and ruled out much of Wordsworth's work as unworthy of a great poet, there still remains a very large number of poems which reach the highest poetic standard both with regard to loftiness of sentiment and beauty of language. Such is the beautiful *Lines composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*, published in the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, which contains the lines so often quoted as expressing the main tenets of that "religion of Nature" of which Wordsworth was the apostle.

Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed

With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith that all which we behold
Is full of blessings.

With the *Lines on Tintern Abbey* the book of *Lyrical Ballads* ends, and as soon as it was published Wordsworth and his sister, with Coleridge, started for Hamburg. At Hamburg Coleridge left the other two and proceeded to the University of Göttingen. Here he stayed for five months. There was a colony of English students at Göttingen, and Coleridge seems soon to have made himself a noted figure among them by his enthusiasm for literature, his inexhaustible flow of eloquence, his metaphysical theories, and his poems. "It is very delightful," writes one of his fellow-students, "to hear him sometimes discourse on religious topics for an hour together." *Christabel*, that weird and beautiful poem, which he began in 1798 and never finished, was recited to his attentive audience, and perhaps received some additions during his stay in Germany. He returned to England in July 1799, having acquired a thorough knowledge of the German language, and increased his taste for metaphysical speculation.

The Wordsworths, meanwhile, had settled for the winter at Goslar, where they lived a retired life, and made very little progress in learning the German language, for which purpose this journey had been made. They suffered severely from the extreme cold, but the poems which Wordsworth wrote during this period are among his very best. They include *Lucy Gray*, *Ruth*, *Nutting*, *The Poet's Epitaph*, and *Lucy*. He also planned and began the long autobiographical poem of which only two parts, *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*, out of the projected three were ever finished.

When they returned to England early in 1799 Wordsworth and his sister settled down in their native and beloved Lake Country. A second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* was published in 1800, in which was included the shorter poems written by

Wordsworth during his stay in Germany. The first edition, so the publisher is reported to have told Coleridge, "had been sold to seafaring men, who, having heard of *The Ancient Mariner*, took the volume for a naval song-book." The second, also, attained no great degree of general popularity. It was violently attacked by the critics, who called *The Ancient Mariner* a "cock-and-bull story," and compared some of Wordsworth's lyrics to *Sing a Song of Sixpence.* Gradually, however, the poems won their way with the public, in spite of hostile reviews, and now the *Lyrical Ballads* have long been recognized as containing some of the finest work produced by the two greatest poets of the early nineteenth century, and also as marking a turning-point in the history of English poetry.

Coleridge and Wordsworth both lived for many years after the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*, but neither of them produced any work of finer quality than that contained in this early volume. The year 1798 was the golden year of Coleridge's poetical life. Soon afterward his powers began to show signs of decay. His brilliant erratic genius wasted itself in fruitless projects, his health failed, and the opium habit, which he apparently formed as early as 1802, ended by bringing about his mental ruin. He died in 1834. Wordsworth lived a quiet, frugal, happy life among his beloved lakes and mountains. In 1802 he married his cousin, Mary Hutchinson, whom he celebrated in the beautiful poem beginning, "She was a phantom of delight." His sister remained an inmate of his house until his death. Children were born, and grew up, and life went calmly with the little family in their remote and beautiful home. A few miles away, at Keswick, lived the poet Southey with his family and the family of his brother-in-law, Coleridge; and Coleridge himself stayed, at intervals, for long periods here or with the Wordsworths. To Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey critics of the day gave the name of "Lake Poets," thus classing together three poets who in their style and their methods differed very widely.

Wordsworth wrote copiously, and his fame gradually grew. He never became a popular poet, but to the comparatively

small company of those who were led to recognize the supreme merit of his work he was, what he has since become to a larger following, an inspired teacher claiming not only admiration, but reverence. He died, in 1850, at the age of eighty.

XVII

BYRON'S CHILDE HAROLD: SHELLEY'S LYRICS

ONE afternoon in May 1798 a schoolboy walked slowly away from the famous Grammar School of Aberdeen toward the small city house which was his home. He was not more than ten years old, but his pale, beautiful face had a look of precocious intelligence, and his splendid dark eyes glowed with strong excitement. He limped slightly as he walked, though his frame was strong and sturdy; but to-day he did not, as he did on common days, glance questioningly and half angrily into the faces of the passers-by to see if his deformity was noticed. He was possessed by one great thought. That day, he, a schoolboy, whose father had died ruined and disgraced, and whose mother lived on a poor one hundred and fifty pounds a year, had become a peer of the realm of England. His heart swelled at the thought, as it had done earlier in the day when his name had been called at school with the proud "Dominus" prefixed to it. He had burst then into a passion of tears, and even now the tears were not very far from those shining eyes which were looking with almost wild exultation over the past and over the future. The boy thought of the fierce old grand-uncle through whose death this great honour had come to him; he recalled childish memories of wild dark tales told of his ancestors; of his father, "Mad Jack Byron," whom, by his mother's injudicious confidences, he knew to have been as profligate as he was handsome. He thought of Newstead Abbey, the grand old house which was now his own; he saw himself reigning there, the proud lord of great possessions. A movement of wild passion shook his boyish soul, which in some dim, half-comprehended fashion, he felt established his kinship with those dead and gone men of his race. Through all

his after-life the memory of that moment remained. He never forgot that he was Lord Byron, member of a proud aristocracy, and he never wholly escaped from the domination of those wild passions that had ruled his ancestors.

Six years later another schoolboy-poet walked like Byron apart from his fellows and felt within him the stirring of an impulse that affected his whole life. This boy was tall and slight, with a fair complexion, large blue eyes, and soft, curling brown hair. His expression was extraordinarily sweet and gentle, and when he was strongly moved there came over his whole face such a glow of feeling as lit it into positive beauty. But for the most part he was quiet and dreamy, and often his eyes seemed to look dully out upon the world around him, because they were dimmed by the splendour of the visions that floated before his brain. He did not care much for the sports the other boys loved. He liked better to pace slowly backward and forward along the southern wall of the Brentford school at which he was a boarder, dreaming his own beautiful dreams. What were his thoughts on that May morning which marked an epoch in his life he himself years afterward told to the world :

I do remember well the hour which burst
My spirit's sleep : a fresh May-dawn it was,
When I walked forth upon the glittering grass,
And wept, I knew not why ; until there rose
From the near schoolroom, voices, that, alas !
Were but one echo from a world of woes—
The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes.

And then I clasped my hands and looked around—
But none was near to mock my streaming eyes,
Which poured their warm drops on the sunny ground—
So, without shame, I spoke :—"I will be wise,
And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies
Such power, for I grow weary to behold
The selfish and the strong still tyrannize
Without reproach or check." I then controlled
My tears, my heart grew calm, and I was meek and bold,
And from that hour did I with earnest thought
Heap knowledge from forbidden mines of lore,
Yet nothing that my tyrants knew or taught
I cared to learn, but from that secret store

Wrought linked armour for my soul, before
It might walk forth to war among mankind ;
Thus power and hope were strengthened more and more
Within me.

Through all his short life Percy Bysshe Shelley was faithful to this ideal of his boyhood. He and Byron were to become two of the greatest figures of the early nineteenth century, and to carry the reaction against the school of Dryden and of Pope to its farthest point. Both, in widely different ways, were to stand as leaders of revolt against the established order of things, and were to breathe into English poetry a swift, strong spirit that should bear it triumphantly into regions where it had never ventured before. But each had to pass a stormy and disastrous youth before he could accomplish his best work.

Byron, even while he was a student at Cambridge, was distinguished by the dark and cynical melancholy of his bearing and conversation. This was to some extent a pose, and proceeded from the same diseased vanity that led him to paint the irregularities of his life in colours far blacker than they deserved. The fierce natural passions that he could not control he turned into a means of self-glorification. He would be as mad and bad as any Byron of his race had ever been, and no one should pity, though they might blame him. In 1807 he published his first poems, *Hours of Idleness*. They had little poetic merit, and the reviewers poured upon them the ridicule which a poet who wrote :

Weary of love, of life, devour'd with spleen,
I rest, a perfect Timon, not nineteen,

ought to have prepared himself to meet. But Byron was furious, and published a few weeks after his coming of age, in January 1809, the clever, savage attack on Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, and other contemporary poets, which he called *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. The following June he left England.

He was absent for two years, travelling in Spain, Italy, Greece, and Turkey. The wildest and most romantic tales are told concerning his life at this period, and it is difficult

to gain any clear idea of what he really did. There remains, however, one solid memento of his travels. On his return he took some poems entitled *Hints from Horace* to a friend. The friend did not think very highly of them. "Have you no other result of your travels?" he asked. "A few short pieces; and a lot of Spenserian stanzas; not worth troubling you with, but you are welcome to them," Byron replied. These Spenserian stanzas were published early in the next year as the first and second cantos of *Childe Harold*. The poem relates the adventurous voyage of a "childe" or young chieftain, whose race "had been glorious in another day." Harold is a dark and gloomy youth, "a shameless wight. Sore given to revel and ungodly glee," who having early run "through Sin's long labyrinth," had felt the "fulness of satiety," and learned to loathe his native land. He is, in fact, Byron as he loved to depict himself, and the voyage of this interesting sinner is the voyage from which Byron had just returned. The poem contains a great deal of affectation and a great deal of showy sentiment, but here and there are rich and splendid passages which give promise of better things. Such as it was, however, it hit the taste of the public of the day. Lord Byron "woke up one morning to find himself famous." London society went mad over *Childe Harold*, and was eager to pay homage to its author. For two years he was the darling of the fashionable world. The poems which followed one another in rapid succession throughout this period roused Byron's adorers to still greater enthusiasm. In 1813 came the *Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos*, in 1814 *The Corsair* and *Lara*. Each of these had its melancholy, interesting wicked hero; each had its brilliant passages shining among others that were bald and immature; in each could be felt, though uncertainly, the breath of that strong, free spirit, which was by and by to carry the author above and beyond his youthful faults. Byron wrote with ease and rapidity, and he liked to give exaggerated accounts of his powers in this direction, and to represent himself as the fine gentleman toying with literature, the aristocrat condescending to amuse himself with composition. "*Lara*," he said, "I wrote while undressing after coming home from balls

and masquerades, in the year of revelry, 1814. *The Bride* was written in four, *The Corsair*, in ten days. This," he added, the true feeling of the poet overcoming the affectation of the fine gentleman, "I take to be a humiliating confession, as it proves my own want of judgment in publishing, and the public's in reading, things which cannot have stamina for permanence." He took all his honours with haughty, though courteous indifference. Yet society continued to adore him. "The women suffocated him," we are told, "with their adulation in drawing-rooms." The Byronic pose became the fashion among young men of all classes, who practised the look of dark and interesting melancholy and the scornful curl of the lip which they saw that their idol affected, and discarded their neckcloths because he appeared in a picturesque turn-down collar.

Then came the change. In 1815 Byron married Miss Milbanke, a beautiful heiress, whose somewhat cold temper and strong regard for conventional propriety were but ill-matched with the quick and passionate nature of her husband. His excesses shocked and frightened her, and soon rumours of disagreements between the two began to be heard. At the beginning of 1816 she left him, and the rumours became darker and more mysterious. There were hints of insanity, and of misconduct so terrible that it could not be spoken of. No open charge, however, was made, and it is probable that Byron's sins were nothing worse than reckless and dissipated acts which his admirers had heretofore condoned and even lauded. But society, tired perhaps of the idol it had worshipped through two long years, chose to be extremely shocked. The chorus of adulation turned to a chorus of disgust. Ladies shuddered if the name of Byron was mentioned in their hearing. He was hissed and insulted in the public streets, and accused of every vice that the imagination of his traducers could picture. His wife, who was regarded by all with the deepest pity and admiration, persistently refused to return to him. With rage and hatred in his heart Byron, in April, set sail from England, vowing that he would never return.

Shelley, meanwhile, had thrown himself headlong into a

war against the injustices and abuses of his day. His gentle nature was continually shocked and outraged by the misery he saw in the world around him, and he blamed all existing laws and institutions for allowing such things to be. Christ's religion had been established in England for more than thirteen centuries, yet man still hated his brother man, and life was still a hideous struggle in which the weak were trampled underfoot. Therefore religion was false, and must be abolished before the Golden Age could come. Marriage vows did not prevent men and women from being false and cruel to those whom they had sworn to love. Therefore marriage was a pernicious institution, and must go. Something after this fashion Shelley reasoned in his hot and generous youth, and he proceeded, with an absolute disregard for consequences, to carry out his principles in his actions. While he was a student at Oxford he published a pamphlet called *The Necessity of Atheism*, and was, in consequence, requested by the authorities to leave the University. His father, a wealthy and narrow-minded Sussex squire, cast him off in anger, and for a time Shelley lived poorly in London, not knowing where to turn for the money to buy his next meal. But nothing could make him retract one article of the creed he had professed. His simple habits made money a matter of indifference to him. He was a water drinker and a vegetarian, and he never thought about food until he grew hungry. Then he would dart into a baker's shop, buy a loaf of bread, and munch it composedly as he walked along the street. For clothes he had an equal disregard. He never wore a greatcoat, and seldom wore a hat. When he had money he bestowed it in lavish though not reckless charity; and of the world's opinion he was utterly regardless.

After a time an arrangement was made between Shelley and his father, by which the young man was to have an allowance of two hundred pounds a year. Soon after this he married. His wife, Harriet, was a beautiful and gentle girl, of a position in life much lower than his own, whose harsh treatment by an unsympathetic father had excited his quixotic generosity. The pair led a wandering life, plunging into all sorts of schemes for the regeneration of mankind.

Shelley spent his time, his energies, and his money unsparingly in the causes he championed, and wrote political tracts and revolutionary poems with equal zest. In 1813 he published his first important work, *Queen Mab*. The poem was universally decried, and was denounced as both immoral and blasphemous. Through it Shelley was definitely brought before the public as an advocate of atheism and an apostle of revolution; and this character he has never wholly lost.

Shelley's marriage proved to be an unhappy one. In 1814 he separated from his wife, and in 1816 she committed suicide. The whole story is very painful, and although Shelley throughout acted strictly in accordance with his openly professed principles, he suffered acutely from self-reproach "at having brought Harriet in the first instance into an atmosphere of thought and life for which her strength of mind had not qualified her." Shelley subsequently married Mary Godwin, daughter of William Godwin, the philosopher and novelist, who had exercised a strong influence over the younger man's intellectual development.

Shelley by this time was receiving, by a new arrangement with his father, an income of one thousand pounds a year. In 1816 he and Mary Godwin left England for Switzerland. They settled at Geneva, and here, very soon afterward, they were joined by Lord Byron, fleeing in rage and despair from his detractors. For some months the poets lived in familiar daily intercourse. They occupied two villas at no great distance from each other, and they spent their days boating upon the lake and reading and talking together. The sweet and gentle-natured Shelley, so free from any thought of self, so full of enthusiasm for the cause of humanity, exerted a strong influence over the haughty, egotistical, world-weary Byron. "He was," Byron declared, "the most gentle, the most amiable, and least worldly minded person I ever met; full of delicacy, disinterested beyond all other men, and possessing a degree of genius joined to simplicity as rare as it is admirable. He had formed to himself a *beau ideal* of all that is fine, high-minded, and noble, and he acted up to this ideal even to the very letter." In Shelley's presence Byron was at his best. His flippancy, his self-consciousness and his worldli-

ness dropped from him in communion with that tender and lovely spirit, and all in him that was generous and noble responded to its influence. Gradually his rage and anger died. "I was in a wretched state of health," he says, "when I was in Geneva; but quiet and the lake soon set me up. I never led so moral a life as during my residence in that country."

In September the Shelleys returned to England, and Byron started on a tour through the Bernese Oberland. Returning to Geneva he took up poetic composition with vigour. *The Prisoner of Chillon* had been written during his tour, and a third canto of *Childe Harold* finished. This third canto, although nominally a part of the poem published in 1812, is in spirit and tone entirely different. "Self-exiled Harold wanders forth again," but this time with a spirit less self-absorbed, and an eye that can look with real and sympathetic insight upon the different objects that meet it. The twenty-first stanza brings us to the immortal lines on Waterloo, which, hackneyed as they are, must always sound with fresh beauty in the ear of one who loves lofty and impassioned verse. There follows the beautiful and famous simile of the broken mirror:

> Even as a broken mirror, which the glass
> In every fragment multiplies; and makes
> A thousand images of one that was,
> The same, and still the more, the more it breaks:
> And thus the heart will do which not forsakes.
> Living in shatter'd guise; and still, and cold,
> And bloodless, with its sleepless sorrow aches,
> Yet withers on till all without is old,
> Showing no visible sign, for such things are untold.

Byron passes on to describe "the greatest, nor the worst of men," Napoleon:

> Conqueror and captive of the earth art thou!
> She trembles at thee still, and thy wild name
> Was ne'er more bruited in men's minds than now
> That thou art nothing, save the jest of Fame.

The pilgrim journeys on to that "exulting and abounding river" over which frowns "the castled crag of Drachenfels," and even his melancholy is softened by the beauty of the

scene. From one picture of loveliness to another the poem passes. We see Lake Leman lying quiet in "the hush of night" and the "swift Rhone" cleaving its way between heights which appear "as lovers who have parted in hate." Clarens suggests a rhapsody on love and on Rousseau, Lausanne and Geneva an eloquent tribute to Gibbon and Voltaire. The canto closes with a passionate invocation to the little daughter he has left behind him in England.

Toward the end of 1816 Byron left Geneva and settled in Venice. Here the fourth canto of *Childe Harold* was finished. It opens with the well-known stanza beginning:

> I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs;
> A palace and a prison on each hand.

There follows one of the most beautiful of the many descriptions that have been written of this unique city. As he wanders on through Italy each town or village brings to his mind the memory of the great men associated with it, and Petrarch, Tasso, and Dante all are celebrated. At last Rome is reached, and the poem rises to its very highest point of impassioned grandeur.

> O Rome! my country! city of the soul!
> The orphans of the heart must turn to thee,
> Lone mother of dead empires! and control
> In their shut breasts their petty misery.
> What are our woes and sufferance? Come and see
> The cypress, hear the owl, and plod your way
> O'er steps of broken thrones and temples, ye!
> Whose agonies are evils of a day—
> A world is at our feet as fragile as our clay.
> The Niobe of Nations! there she stands,
> Childless and crownless, in her voiceless woe;
> An empty urn within her wither'd hands,
> Whose holy dust was scatter'd long ago;
> The Scipios' tomb contains no ashes now;
> The very sepulchres lie tenantless
> Of their heroic dwellers; dost thou flow,
> Old Tiber! through a marble wilderness?
> Rise, with thy yellow waves, and mantle her distress.

As the poet recounts the history, and passes in review the most famous treasures of the great city, thoughts and

Percy Bysshe Shelley
From an engraving

John Keats
William Hilton, R.A.

recollections rush to his mind. "The voice of Marius," said Sir Walter Scott, "could not sound more deep and solemn among the ruins of Carthage, than the strains of the pilgrim among the broken shrines and fallen statues of her subduer."

Byron's life at Venice was the wildest and most dissipated part of his whole career. Shelley's influence was withdrawn, and the reports that reached him from England of the stories concerning him current there, exasperated his haughty spirit, and drove him to find relief in the wildest of excesses. Time after time he ventured his life in dangerous exploits upon the sea, until the boatmen called him the "English fish" and the "sea-devil," and said that he "dived for his poetry." His temper seemed utterly reckless, and his hatred of England and everything English became almost a mania. Yet throughout these miserable years he was writing continually—brilliant, stormy, wonderful verses such as no one but Byron could have produced. But riotous living was affecting his health, and had he gone on in it much longer his powers must have failed him. Happily the same influence which in 1816 had done so much to help him toward a purer and wiser life was soon once more to come to his aid.

In 1818 Shelley and his wife again left England—this time never to return. After a suit in Chancery the relations of Shelley's first wife had succeeded—largely on the ground of his so-called immoral opinions and conduct—in obtaining a decree depriving him of the custody of her children. Shelley was heartbroken; and a wild fear lest the children of his second marriage might also be taken from him was one of the motives which led him to seek a home abroad. They travelled through northern Italy, and in August Shelley, leaving his wife at the Bagni de Lucca, paid a visit to Byron in Venice. The old relations were taken up: the two poets rode and walked and talked together, and Byron once more became the "gentle, patient, unassuming companion," "cheerful, frank, witty," and fascinating, who appears in Shelley's description. Byron lent the Shelleys his villa at Este, near Venice, for the autumn, and here Shelley produced his beautiful description of the passing of a day which he called

Lines Written among the Euganean Hills; the first of that wonderful series of lyrics which belong to the last four years of his life. Most of his important longer works were also composed at this time, but of these we shall not speak in detail here. In them Shelley tried to express all the great ideas that filled his brain, all his plans for the world's regeneration, all his hatred of oppression and tyranny. They are full of the finest and truest poetry. They show how the hot fire in Shelley's blood was gradually passing into the burning steady glow of a wiser and more effective enthusiasm, how the crudeness of his early years was mellowing into a wonderful ripeness and perfection. If Shelley had lived a few years longer he would probably have been as great a teacher as he is a poet, and the reproach that he gave to the world nothing fit for "human nature's daily food" would have been lifted from him.

But it is for his lyrics that Shelley will always be best remembered and best loved. They are not, as are the lyrics of the Elizabethans and the lyrics of Burns, primarily songs. The reader is so carried away by what Professor Myers has called the "exciting and elevating quality" of the poem that he is scarcely conscious of the beauties of its versification. Each lyric is like a pure, bright flame which owes the perfection of its form to its glowing heat and its irresistible tendency upward.

Great as are his poems, however, his personality was even more wonderful and delightful. "The truth was," wrote a later friend, Captain Trelawny, "Shelley loved everything better than himself. . . . All who heard him felt the charm of his simple, earnest manner." "Shelley's mental activity was infectious, he kept your brain in constant action." "He never laid aside his book and magic mantle; he waved his wand, and Byron, after a faint show of defiance, stood mute." Trelawny joined the little circle of friends who had gathered round Shelley in his Italian home, in January 1822. His famous account of his first meeting with the poet, though it belongs to a later date, may be given here, for no other description could enable us to realize so fully the personality of the man who wrote the wonderful lyrics we are considering.

Trelawny arrived on a visit to Captain and Mrs Williams, Shelley's intimate friends. "The Williamses received me in their earnest, cordial manner; we had a great deal to communicate to each other, and were in loud and animated conversation, when I was rather put out by observing in the passage near the open door, opposite to where I sat, a pair of glittering eyes steadily fixed on mine; it was too dark to make out whom they belonged to. With the acuteness of a woman Mrs Williams's eyes followed the direction of mine, and going to the doorway she laughingly said, 'Come in, Shelley, it's only our friend Tre just arrived.' Swiftly gliding in, blushing like a girl, a tall, thin stripling held out both his hands; and although I could hardly believe, as I looked at his flushed, feminine and artless face, that it could be the great poet, I returned his warm pressure. After the ordinary greetings and courtesies he sat down and listened. I was silent from astonishment: was it possible this mild-looking, beardless boy could be the veritable monster, at war with all the world?—excommunicated by the Fathers of the Church, deprived of his civil rights by the fiat of a grim Lord Chancellor, discarded by every member of his family, and denounced by the rival sages of our literature as the founder of a Satanic school? I could not believe it; it must be a hoax. He was habited like a boy, in a black jacket and trousers, which he seemed to have outgrown, or his tailor, as is the custom, had most shamefully stinted him in his 'sizings.' Mrs Williams saw my embarrassment, and to relieve me asked Shelley what book he had in his hand? His face brightened, and he answered briskly: 'Calderon's *Magico Prodigioso*—I am translating some passages in it.'

"'Oh, read it to us.'

"Shoved off from the shore of commonplace incidents that could not interest him, and fairly launched on a theme that did, he instantly became oblivious of everything but the book in his hand. The masterly manner in which he analysed the genius of the author, his lucid interpretation of the story, and the ease with which he translated into our language the most subtle and imaginative passages of the Spanish poet, were marvellous, as was his command of the two languages. After

this touch of his quality I no longer doubted his identity; a dead silence ensued; looking up, I asked:

"'Where is he?'

"Mrs Williams said, 'Who? Shelley? Oh, he comes and goes like a spirit, no one knows when or where.'"

Such was Shelley at the beginning of 1822, and such he was, substantially, when in 1818 he dreamed away that sunny October day among the Euganean Hills, and, looking down, saw where, "islanded" in that "green sea, The waveless plain of Lombardy":

> Underneath Day's azure eyes
> Ocean's nursling, Venice lies,

and saw, also, floating before his enraptured eyes, the vision that constantly haunted him—that calm and happy place

> Where for me, and those I love,
> May a windless bower be built,
> Far from passion, pain, and guilt . . .
> And the love which heals all strife
> Circling, like the breath of life,
> All things in that sweet abode
> With its own mild brotherhood.

But the time for the realization of this ideal was still very far off. Fresh trouble was quickly coming on poor Shelley. His little daughter fell ill, and died. Shelley suffered terribly, though his friends tell us that he said little, and was ready, with his usual buoyancy of spirits, to join in the simple amusements of his little circle. But the lyrics written during that winter show that a deep-seated grief possessed him. Some of his melancholy was due to the state of his own health. He was growing stronger and the danger of consumption, which in England had seemed imminent, had passed away. But he was tormented with acute pains for which the doctors were at a loss to ascribe a cause, and with occasional spasms that endangered his life. The *Stanzas written in Dejection near Naples* in December 1818 contains that beautiful verse which is the cry of a gentle spirit heavily oppressed:

Yet now despair itself is mild,
Even as the winds and waters are;
I could lie down like a tired child,
And weep away the life of care
Which I have borne and yet must bear,—
Till death like sleep might steal on me,
And I might feel in the warm air
My cheek grow cold, and hear the sea
Breathe o'er my dying brain its last monotony.

Early in 1819 the Shelleys moved to Rome, and there, in June, Shelley's little son, William, died. He had now no children save those far away in England who were growing up with no knowledge of their father. His friends tell with what devotion he had nursed the boy in his short illness, and how utterly heartbroken he was when the end came. But grief seemed to drive him to poetical expression as a means of relief. At Leghorn, where he removed soon after his son's death, he resumed his great work *Prometheus Unbound*, and began and finished *The Cenci*. The first of these works contains the lyric at which many critics have cavilled, and some have sneered:

Life of Life! thy lips enkindle
With their love the breath between them;
And thy smiles before they dwindle
Make the cold air fire; then screen them
In those looks, where whoso gazes
Faints, entangled in their mazes.

"What does it all mean?" the critics have asked; and even the most devoted student of Shelley might be puzzled to put the verse into plain prose. Shelley did not hold the Wordsworthian theory that poetry is only prose, with metre superadded, and he found it difficult to express the conceptions of his fervent imagination in plain, deliberate language. But the obscurity is rather verbal than real; and the "exciting and elevating" quality of Shelley's verse is nowhere more plainly felt than in this lyric.

The great year of 1819 saw not only the two long poems that have been mentioned, but also some shorter lyrics come into being. The most wonderful among these is the *Ode to the*

West Wind, which to attempt to appraise here would be an impertinence. It belongs to those works which lie far above criticism and are apprehended not so much by the intelligence as by the spirit.

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, O hear!

This was written at Florence, whither the Shelleys had gone in the autumn of 1819, and here *Prometheus Unbound* was finished. In January 1820 the wanderers found a resting-place at Pisa, where they remained until April 1822. Life here passed calmly and happily. Shelley's cousin, Captain Medwin, came out from England to stay with him, and he became intimate with the circle of the Mr and Mrs Williams who have before been mentioned. He wrote industriously, and his verses ranged from familiar epistles to inspired lyrics like *The Cloud* and the *Ode to a Skylark*, which are probably the best known of all his works. In December came the news that Keats had died at Rome, and Shelley's generous but, as it proved, mistaken sympathy found expression in the great elegy, *Adonais*. In August 1821 he paid a visit to Lord Byron, who was then living at Ravenna. In order to be near Shelley Byron removed to Pisa in November 1821, and from that time until the end of Shelley's life, which came seven months later, the two poets once more lived in familiar daily intercourse. They went sailing on the Arno and practised pistol-

shooting together, then returned home and talked far into the night. Some part of each day Shelley spent in solitude, wandering in the great pinewood near Pisa, with a book, or a lyric in the making. The beautiful *Swiftly Walk o'er the Western Wave* belongs to this period, and Trelawny tells how he found the poet one day lying under a tree with the manuscript of the lyric *With a Guitar, to Jane*, which "might have been taken for a sketch of a marsh overgrown with bulrushes, and the blots for wild ducks." On the whole Byron's companionship was not favourable to Shelley's poetic activity. Shelley was so naturally humble-minded, and had such a sincere admiration for the genius of his friend, that he was led to underrate his own powers and become discouraged. "What think you of Lord B.'s last volume?" he wrote. "In my opinion it contains finer poetry than has appeared in England since *Paradise Lost.*" In 1822 he wrote to Leigh Hunt: "I do not write, I have lived too long near Lord Byron, and the sun has extinguished the glow-worm." Nevertheless, he was not without a just conception of the merits of his own poetry. "This I know," he once said, "that whether in prosing or in versing, there is something in my writings that shall live for ever."

In the spring of 1822 Byron took a villa near Leghorn, and the rest of the party left Pisa for a house at Lerici on the Gulf of Spezia, where they intended to spend the summer. Both Byron and Shelley, before leaving Pisa, had a yacht built for excursions on the sea. Byron's yacht was called the *Bolivar* and Shelley's the *Ariel*. In the *Ariel* Shelley spent the greater part of each day, meditating his last great unfinished poem, *The Triumph of Life*, in which he sees pass by the great of all the ages in a slow majestic procession. The last words that he wrote were, "'Then what is Life?' I cried." The time was rapidly coming for Shelley, when this, and all the questions that had vexed him on earth, would trouble him no more.

On the 1st of July Shelley and his friend Williams started in the yacht *Ariel* for Leghorn, to meet Leigh Hunt, who was coming out to help Byron in establishing a newspaper which was to be called *The Liberal*, and which was to be used as a

medium for the publication of the works which, from their daring, unconventional character, his publishers might hesitate to accept. The project had been warmly supported by Shelley, who loved the kindly, open-hearted Hunt, and was anxious to help him to a position which would relieve him from the money difficulties in which he was involved. The travelling expenses of Hunt and his family had been met by means of a loan from Shelley, and on the news of their arrival he hastened to do what he could for their comfort. He established them in Byron's Palazzo at Leghorn, and early on the next day set out on the return voyage to Lerici. There was only one sailor on board with Williams and Shelley. In the afternoon a great tempest came on. It lasted for only twenty minutes, and after it was over, Trelawny, who was on board Byron's yacht in the harbour of Leghorn, looked in vain for the little *Ariel*. She had gone down in that brief storm.

For a week the anxious friends searched all along the shore. On July 18 Shelley's body was cast up near Via Reggio. In one pocket of his jacket was a volume of Sophocles, in the other the poems of Keats, " doubled back, as if the reader in the act of reading had hastily thrust it away." The other bodies were cast up some miles farther along the coast. The body of Shelley was temporarily buried in the sand, and, on August 16, a pile was built there, and it was cremated. Byron, Leigh Hunt, and Trelawny were present. " The lonely and grand scenery that surrounded us so exactly harmonized with Shelley's genius, that I could imagine his spirit soaring over us. The sea, with the islands of Gorgona, Cupraja and Elba, was before us ; old battlemented watchtowers stretched along the coast, backed by the marble-crested Apennines glistening in the sun, picturesque from their diversified outlines, and not a human dwelling was in sight." The ashes were laid in the burial-ground at Rome, near those of Keats, and of Shelley's son, William.

Less than two years later Byron also was dead. In July 1823 he, with Trelawny, sailed from Genoa to Greece, for the purpose of offering themselves as volunteers in the Greek War of Liberation. They arrived in Greece early in August and were received with great warmth. Byron was appointed

to a command and behaved with the greatest bravery and wisdom. But his strength was not equal to the hardships of this new way of life. Food was scarce, and the house that he occupied was situated on low, boggy ground, from which constant exhalations arose. On April 11, 1824, he fell ill with rheumatic fever, and on the 19th he died.

In Greece he was deeply and universally mourned. His body was embalmed, and the funeral service performed at Missolonghi, with all the honours commonly given to a prince of the royal line. Afterward the remains were taken to England, and buried in the village church at Hucknall.

On the 22nd of the previous July, the day on which he completed his thirty-sixth year, Byron had written his last poem, the two concluding verses of which may serve in some sense as his epitaph.

If thou regret'st thy youth, *why live?*
The land of honourable death
Is here:—up to the field, and give
Away thy breath!

Seek out—less often sought than found—
A soldier's grave, for thee the best;
Then look around, and choose thy ground,
And take thy rest.

XVIII

ENDYMION

DURING the first quarter of the nineteenth century, ushered in by the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*, there was formed in London a little group of literary men which was only second in importance to that other group whose members were making the name of the Lake Country famous. Chief among these—the "Cockneys," as they were called by scornful reviewers—was Leigh Hunt. He stood first not because he was the greatest writer, but because of his influence over his companions. Through him the different members of the group were drawn and kept together. At his pleasant house at Hampstead they all met, and at his frequent and informal supper-parties works which have since become English classics were suggested or discussed. Among those who came often was Shelley, a tall, slim, youthful figure with bright wild eyes, and pale, beautiful face. Charles Lamb came sometimes from his lodgings in the Inner Temple, and sat among the company shy and silent, until excitement and good-fellowship unloosed his tongue, and drove from his sweet and delicate face the lines of suffering commonly to be seen there. William Hazlitt, the essayist, worn and thin and saturnine, gave pungency to the conversation by his rough and downright criticisms. Horace Smith (author of *The Baby's Debut*) and his no less witty brother vied with their host and with Charles Lamb in the making of puns, which, on these evenings, flowed in a continuous stream. Charles Cowden Clarke, honourably known by his work in connexion with the plays of Shakespeare, listened and commented in his quiet sensible fashion, and there were many other guests who, well known in their own day, have not been kept in remembrance by later generations. Leigh Hunt himself, and the place of meeting, shall be described in the

words of Shelley, written some years after, from his home in Italy, in a poetical *Letter to Maria Gisborne*:

> You will see Hunt; one of those happy souls
> Which are the salt of the earth, and without whom
> This world would smell like what it is, a tomb;
> Who is, what others seem. His room no doubt,
> Is still adorned by many a case from Shout,
> With graceful flowers tastefully placed about;
> And coronals of bay from ribbons hung,
> And brighter wreaths in neat disorder flung,
> The gifts of the most learn'd among some dozens
> Of female friends, sisters-in-law, and cousins.
> And there is he with his eternal puns,
> Which beat the dullest brain for smiles, like duns
> Thundering for money at a poet's door;
> Alas! it is no use to say, "I'm poor!"—
> Or oft in graver mood, when he will look
> Things wiser than were ever read in book,
> Except in Shakespeare's wisest tenderness.

One evening, in the spring of 1816, Cowden Clarke brought with him to Hunt's cottage some poems in manuscript written by a friend of his, John Keats. Keats, he explained, was the son of a livery-stable proprietor, and had been a scholar at his (Cowden Clarke's) father's school at Enfield. He had afterward been apprenticed to a surgeon, and had come up to London in 1814 to study at Guy's Hospital. He was not yet twenty-one years old, and was living with his two brothers in lodgings in St Thomas's Street. Hunt and Horace Smith, who happened to be with him, were surprised and delighted at the quality of the poems. They eagerly questioned Cowden Clarke about the personality of the author, and begged him to bring John Keats, as soon as possible, to one of their evening gatherings. Accordingly, there accompanied Cowden Clarke on his next visit a slight, short, but well-proportioned youth with a countenance "of singular beauty and brightness" and an expression "as if he had been looking on some glorious sight." This was John Keats.

Keats soon became very intimate at the Hampstead cottage. Hunt's genial cheerfulness and optimistic view of life raised the spirits of the younger man and encouraged

him in his work. The love of beauty, which in Keats was a passion, existed in Hunt in the milder form of a keen capacity for sensuous enjoyment, and the two luxuriated together over green fields, and blue skies and summer rain—over their favourite books, especially *The Faerie Queene*, and the literature of ancient Greece, which latter, however, Keats could read only in translations. His appreciation of the cordial hospitality offered him by Hunt was keen, and is recorded in several of his poems. One of these tells of his feelings on the lonely walk home after he had left his friend's house.

> For I am brimful of the friendliness
> That in a little cottage I have found.

Keats soon became known to all Hunt's intimates. Shelley he did not meet until the spring of 1817, and then he responded but coldly to the advances which the other made with such warmth and eagerness. He suspected Shelley, the heir to an old and wealthy baronetcy, of some hidden contempt for the son of a keeper of livery stables. He was, says Hunt, "a little too sensitive on the score of his origin," and "felt inclined to see in every man of birth a sort of natural enemy." So the two poets, though they met many times during the months that followed, never really became friends.

All this time Keats was going on with his studies at the hospital, and was doing his work steadily and conscientiously, though without enthusiasm. In October 1816 he came of age, and, encouraged by his friends and by his two brothers, who were among his most sincere admirers, he resolved to devote himself entirely to poetry. The brothers had inherited a small sum of money, enough for present necessities, though not enough to afford them a permanent income, and with this very insufficient barrier between himself and want Keats made his venture. In March 1817 he published his first volume of poems. They were not of any very great poetical merit; the well-known sonnet on Chapman's Homer stood highest. But they showed rich promise of better things in their intense appreciation of the beautiful, and their note of entire abandonment to poetic impulse. "Here is a young poet," wrote Leigh Hunt, in his paper, *The Examiner*,

" giving himself up to his own impressions, and revelling in real poetry for its own sake." Hunt's personal knowledge of Keats helped him to a true appreciation of the poems, and his review was marked equally by kindliness and insight. But other less interested critics saw nothing in the little volume to call for special notice. Few copies were sold. A public that was still raving over *Childe Harold* and *The Corsair* could scarcely be expected to admire the quieter and very different beauties contained in these early poems of Keats, and the reviewers were still occupied with the " Lake Poets " and Wordsworth's *Excursion.* But the turn of the " Cockney School " was soon to come.

Keats accepted the failure of his first venture in a manly and modest spirit. He was not disheartened, but was, instead, stirred up to greater efforts. His friends thought that retirement and solitude would help to mature his powers for the accomplishment of some really great work. In April 1817, therefore, Keats left London and went to stay at the Isle of Wight.

Unwonted solitude among new and lovely surroundings wrought Keats to such a state of excited sensibility as drove him to poetic composition. The day after his arrival at the Isle of Wight he sent to one of his friends the beautiful sonnet *On the Sea,* beginning :

> It keeps eternal whisperings around
> Desolate shores, and with its mighty spell
> Gluts twice ten thousand caverns.

" I find I cannot do without poetry," he wrote, in the letter that accompanied the sonnet, " without eternal poetry ; half the day will not do—the whole of it. I began with a little, but habit has made me a leviathan. I had become all in a tremble from not having written anything of late : the sonnet overleaf did me good ; I slept the better last night for it ; this morning, however, I am nearly as bad again. I shall forthwith being my *Endymion.*"

That this overwrought condition was not entirely healthy Keats himself was fully conscious. " In a week or so," he wrote to Leigh Hunt, " I became not over-capable in my

upper stories, and set off pell-mell for Margate." At Margate worries concerning money brought another disturbing influence. "Truth is," wrote Keats, "I have a horrid Morbidity of Temperament, which has shown itself at intervals; it is, I have no doubt, the greatest Enemy and stumbling-block I have to fear." Yet through excitement and dejection *Endymion* went steadily on. Keats was bravely trying to combat the extreme sensibility which tended to make him the slave of each present impulse. He had set himself a task which demanded sustained effort, and that task he meant to fulfil. "I will begin," he wrote,

> Now while I cannot hear the city's din;
> Now while the early budders are just new,
> And run in mazes of the youngest hue
> About old forests; while the willow trails
> Its delicate amber; and the dairy pails
> Bring home increase of milk. And, as the year
> Grows lush in juicy stalks, I'll smoothly steer
> My little boat, for many quiet hours,
> With streams that deepen freshly into bowers,
> Many and many a verse I hope to write,
> Before the daisies, vermeil rimm'd and white
> Hide in deep herbage; and ere yet the bees
> Hum about globes of clover and sweet-peas,
> I may be near the middle of my story.
> O may no wintry season, bare and hoary,
> See it half finish'd: but let Autumn bold,
> With universal tinge of sober gold
> Be all about me when I make an end.

After a short stay at Canterbury with his brother Tom—who was already in an advanced stage of consumption, the disease from which their mother had died—the poet returned to London. The brothers moved to new lodgings at Hampstead. Here their old friends were all around them and new friendships were speedily formed. The little party that during the winter had met in Hunt's cottage, now held converse on the breezy heath, and here, walking up and down, Keats would recite to his friends the passages in the poem he was writing that seemed to him most worthy of their attention. His beautiful voice had in it those low rich tones that stir the heart, and as he went on, half-chanting the fervid,

melodious lines, his dark glowing eyes took on an "inward look, perfectly divine, like a Delphian priestess who saw visions." It is no wonder that the friends who heard him never forgot that summer of 1817, and have told us of its golden days in tender, fervent words. Keats was happy in this, that all his life a little band of devoted friends reverenced him as a poet and loved him as a man. They neither loved nor reverenced him less because often after an impassioned recital his mood would suddenly change, and he would burst into hearty boyish laughter that preluded a string of jokes and nonsense which allowed no one to be serious again for the rest of that meeting; nor because he was obstinately fixed in his own ideas and opinions and upheld them with pugnacity.

Shelley was strongly interested in the progress of *Endymion*, and invited Keats to stay with him at his house at Great Marlow and continue the work there. But Keats declined the invitation, perhaps suspecting patronage, perhaps feeling that he could write better in his own home. In November *Endymion* was finished, and in the spring of the next year it was published.

Its story is the story of the beautiful youth who, as the classic legend tells, was beloved by the moon. By her power he was cast into an eternal sleep on Mount Latmus, and here every night she visited him, having inspired him with a love equal to her own. This theme Keats expanded and embroidered in his own rich and glowing fashion. The poem is full of crudities and of lapses which, if we like to use a harsh name, may even be called absurdities, but it is nevertheless a great and memorable work. Its opening line has passed into a proverb, and the passage which follows is typical, in its glowing beauty, of the finest parts of the poem.

> A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
> Its loveliness increases; it will never
> Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
> A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
> Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
> Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
> A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
> Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth

Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways
Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits. Such the sun, the moon,
Trees old, and young, sprouting a shady boon
For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
With the green world they live in; and clear rills
That for themselves a cooling covert make
'Gainst the hot season; the mid forest brake,
Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blooms:
And such too is the grandeur of the dooms
We have imagined for the mighty dead;
All lovely tales that we have heard or read:
And endless fountains of immortal drink,
Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink.

The poem does not entirely fulfil the promise of this beginning. Taken as a whole it is a confused and almost formless piece of work, open to criticism at almost every point. But the richness of the verse and the fine harmonies that rise and fall and die away and rise again as it proceeds, draw the reader on from one beautiful passage to the next, which never lies very far away. The preface which Keats wrote to this work is a memorable one. "Knowing within myself the manner in which this Poem has been produced, it is not without a feeling of regret that I make it public.

"What manner I mean, will be quite clear to the reader, who must soon perceive great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished. The two first books, and indeed the two last, I feel sensible are not of such completion as to warrant their passing the press; nor should they if I thought a year's castigation would do them any good; it will not: the foundations are too sandy. It is just that this youngster should die away: a sad thought for me, if I had not some hope that while it is dwindling I may be plotting, and fitting myself for verses fit to live."

No self-criticism could have been conceived in a juster or a saner spirit, and this preface goes far toward clearing Keats from the charge of feverish vanity which is one of the many charges that have been brought against him.

Endymion

A month or so after *Endymion* was published Keats started on a walking tour through Scotland with his friend Charles Brown. The expedition was a disastrous one. Bad food and exposure to the weather made Keats so ill that early in August he was obliged to give up the rest of the tour and go home from Inverness as quickly as possible. From this illness he never really recovered. His hereditary tendency to consumption developed rapidly, and in little more than two years brought his life to an end.

He arrived in London just in time for the reviews of *Endymion* which had appeared in the leading magazines. *Blackwood's* had for some time been devoting itself to the castigation of the "Cockney School," and Keats had already been referred to as an "amiable bardling," "the puling satellite of the arch-offender and king of Cockaigne, Hunt." In the August number *Blackwood* settled down to demolish his new poem. The article, like others of the series, was signed Z, and the name of the writer has never been certainly ascertained; it was probably Lockhart, son-in-law to Sir Walter Scott, who was on the staff of *Blackwood* and had by the sharpness of his reviews gained for himself the name of "the Scorpion." "The frenzy of the *Poems*," the writer says, "was bad enough in its way; but it did not alarm us half so seriously as the calm, settled, imperturbable, drivelling idiocy of *Endymion*. . . . Back to the shop, Mr John, back to plaster, pills, and ointment boxes." In September *The Quarterly Review* followed with an article of a similar character. The writer, after acknowledging that he had read only the first book of *Endymion*, of which he could make nothing, goes on to accuse "Johnny Keats" of being a mere copyist of Mr Leigh Hunt, only "ten times more tiresome and absurd than his prototype." "It is not," he says, "that the author has not powers of language, rays of fancy, and gleams of genius—he has all these; but he is, unhappily, a disciple of the new school of what has been somewhere called Cockney poetry; which may be defined to consist of the most incongruous ideas in the most uncouth language."

Keats, who had himself been strongly conscious of the defects of his work, was less moved by these reviews than

were his indignant friends. The popular idea of his having been "snuffed out by an article" is entirely false. "Praise or blame," he wrote to a friend who had sent him various cuttings from newspapers, in which his work was defended, and his critics attacked, "has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critique on his own Works. My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what *Blackwood* or the *Quarterly* could possibly inflict." It is true that by this time his health began rapidly to fail, but that was due not to the reviews, but to the development of his consumptive tendency, and to the violence of the attachment that he conceived for a Miss Fanny Brawne, a neighbour of his friend, Charles Brown. His passion took entire possession of him, and the impossibility of marriage—his own money was now all spent, and he was living on loans from his friends—constantly tormented him.

Yet in spite of these troubles his poetic work went on. In 1820 was published a volume containing some of his finest poems. *Lamia* and *Hyperion*, like *Endymion*, deal with the life of the ancient Greeks. *Isabella* and *The Eve of St Agnes* are romantic poems, touching the old medieval legends. The very finest work in the book is contained in the three great odes—*Ode to a Nightingale, Ode to a Grecian Urn, Ode to Autumn.* In them the promise of *Endymion* is grandly fulfilled.

While this volume was passing through the press came Keats's first attack of hæmorrhage, showing that the disease from which he was suffering had reached an acute stage. After some weeks he rallied, but the attacks recurred, and his health declined rapidly. The news of the success of his book and of a favourable notice in *The Edinburgh Review*, though it cheered, could not help him. As the summer drew to an end the doctors strongly advised him to leave England for Italy. Shelley, who was then at Pisa, wrote with the utmost kindness and delicacy inviting Keats to be his guest for the winter. But this invitation, like the former one, was declined, in a letter which, however, shows the writer's deep appreciation of the friendliness of the offer. Keats decided

at last to go to Rome, and, accompanied by his friend, Joseph Severn, he set out on September 18. The story of these last months of Keats's life is a story of ever-increasing bodily and mental agony, but it is made beautiful by the unselfish devotion of Severn, who gave up his own work and all thoughts of his own advancement to tend his dying friend. On February 23, 1821, the end came, quietly and peacefully.

Keats was buried in the English burying-place at Rome. On his tomb was inscribed the epitaph that he himself had asked Severn to place there: "Here lies one whose name was writ in water." We know now how mistaken was this mournful self-judgment. The name of the poet who died before he had finished his twenty-sixth year is written in immortal letters on the roll of fame, among the names of the greatest of his brethren. His memory lives in his own poems, and in Shelley's magnificent elegy, *Adonais*.

He has outsoared the shadow of our night;
Envy and calumny and hate and pain,
And that unrest which men miscall delight,
Can touch him not and torture not again.
From the contagion of the world's slow stain
He is secure, and now can never mourn
A heart grown cold, a head grown grey, in vain;
Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,
With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn.

XIX

THE LAY OF THE LAST MINSTREL: WAVERLEY

FOUR years after the appearance of the *Lyrical Ballads* there came from the Edinburgh press a volume which, in its way, was almost as significant of the new spirit that was working in English poetry as that famous book itself. This was the first volume of the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, a collection of Scottish ballads edited by Walter Scott. We have seen Walter Scott before, when, as a shy young law-student of sixteen, he sat silent in Dr Fergusson's drawing-room, overawed by the presence of the great Burns. Even then he had begun his work of collecting the old ballads of the Border, though with no purpose of publication, but through pure love of the countryside and its stories. Every half-holiday saw him setting out, with a few friends whose tastes were similar to his own, on a long ramble through the rural districts round about Edinburgh. Many an odd verse of a ballad and many a strange story he picked up from the country folk who were always ready to talk to the bright-faced youth who met them with such hearty friendliness. Sometimes these rambles grew into long excursions. We read that on one occasion the party found themselves thirty miles from Edinburgh, without a sixpence between them. "We were put to our shifts," says Walter Scott, "but we asked every now and then at a cottage door for a drink of water, and one or two of the good wives, observing our worn-out looks, brought forth milk in place of water, so that with that, and hips and haws, we were little the worse." He himself, in spite of his lameness, footed it as gallantly as any of the little band. When he reached home his father, a grave Scottish lawyer, asked him how he had managed to get food during so long an excursion on his scanty store of money.

"Pretty much like the young ravens," the son answered; "I only wished I had been as good a player on the flute as poor George Primrose in *The Vicar of Wakefield*. If I had his art, I should like nothing better than to tramp like him from cottage to cottage all over the world." "I doubt," said his father, who entirely disapproved of such tastes in a young student of law, "I greatly doubt, sir, you were born for nae better than a gangrel scrapegut"—which is to say, a wandering fiddler. Such was not the fate reserved for Walter Scott, but these country excursions went far toward deciding that law should take but a second place in his life-work.

As he grew older, and became more his own master, these jaunts lengthened into "raids" as he called them, lasting for several weeks. "During seven successive years," writes his son-in-law and biographer, John Gibson Lockhart, "Scott made a *raid* into Liddesdale with Mr Shortreed, sheriff substitute of Roxburghshire, who knew the district well, for his guide; exploring every rivulet to its source, and every ruined peel (castle) from foundation to battlement. . . . There was no inn or public-house of any kind in the whole valley; the travellers passed from the shepherd's hut to the minister's manse, and again from the cheerful hospitality of the manse to the rough and jolly welcome of the homestead; gathering, wherever they went, songs and tunes, and occasionally more tangible relics of antiquity. . . . To these rambles Scott owed much of the materials of his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*."

But how soon he had any definite object before him in his researches seems very doubtful. "He was *makin' himsell* a' the time," said Mr Shortreed; "but he didna ken maybe what he was about till years had passed: at first he thought o' little, I dare say, but the queerness and the fun. . . . Eh me! such an endless fund o' humour and drollery as he then had wi' him! Never ten yards but we were either laughing or roaring and singing. Wherever we stopped, how brawlie he suited himsel' to everybody! He aye did as the lave did; never made himsel' the great man, or took ony airs in the company."

When it did occur to Scott to turn his miscellaneous

gatherings to account he set to work with characteristic energy to make his collection complete. He obtained the help of various friends, who became almost as enthusiastic in the matter as he was himself. He wrote for it, also, several original ballads, including the celebrated *Eve of St John.* The collection increased rapidly, and finally filled three volumes instead of the one originally contemplated. The first and second volumes were published in 1802, and in a letter written by Scott during the same year we find the earliest mention of his first important original work, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel.* "In the third volume," he says, "I intend to publish Cadyow Castle, a historical sort of a ballad upon the death of the Regent Murray, and besides this, a long poem of my own. It will be a kind of romance of Border chivalry, in a light-horseman sort of stanza."

In the Introduction to the edition of his poems published in 1830 Scott tells us how the *Lay* gradually took form, but he tells it in much more lively fashion in a letter written to Miss Seward, the poetess, in 1805. "I began," he says, "and wandered forward, like one in a pleasant country, getting to the top of one hill to see a prospect, and to the bottom of another to enjoy a shade; and what wonder if my course has been devious and desultory, and many of my excursions altogether unprofitable to the advance of my journey? The Dwarf Page is also an excrescence, and I plead guilty to all the censures concerning him. The truth is, he has a history, and it is this: The story of Gilpin Horner was told by an old gentleman to Lady Dalkeith, and she, much diverted with his actually believing so grotesque a tale, insisted that I should make it into a Border ballad. I don't know if ever you saw my lovely chieftainess—if you have you must be aware that it is *impossible* for anyone to refuse her request, as she has more of the angel in her face and temper than anyone alive, so that if she had asked me to write a ballad on a broomstick, I must have attempted it. I began a few verses to be called the Goblin Page; and they lay long by me, till the applause of some friends whose judgment I valued, induced me to resume the poem; so on I wrote, knowing no more than the man in the moon how I was to end. At length the story

appeared so uncouth, that I was fain to put it into the mouth of my old Minstrel—lest the nature of it should be misunderstood, and I should be suspected of setting up a new school of poetry, instead of a feeble attempt to imitate the old. In the process of the romance, the page, intended to be a principal person in the work, contrived (from the baseness of his natural propensities) to slink downstairs into the kitchen, and now he must e'en abide there."

Scott's "lovely chieftainess," Lady Dalkeith, afterward Duchess of Buccleuch, was the wife of the head of that clan or family of which Scott was proud to proclaim himself a member. During the years he spent at Ashestiel (1804–12) he was in the midst of the Buccleuch estates. Here grew up the friendship with the family which lasted for the rest of his life. He puts into the mouth of his old harper the expression of those feelings of fealty and devotion to the "Duchess" of the story which he himself felt for the Duchess he knew so well.

A year or two before Scott began to write his *Lay* he had heard recited by Sir John Stoddart Coleridge's then unpublished poem, *Christabel.* The metre of this poem had remained in his memory and he adopted it, or something like it, for his own work. The story of Gilpin Horner was one which was current in the district. One night some men returning to their homes at Eskdale Muir, on the Border, heard a voice calling "tint, tint, tint" (lost). They called, and a misshapen child-dwarf appeared. It lived at Eskdale for some time, then one evening a voice was heard crying, "Gilpin Horner." The dwarf answered, "That is me, I must away," and disappeared, at the call, it was supposed, of the devil, who thus reclaimed his own.

The Lay of the Last Minstrel, like most of Scott's works, was written very rapidly. When he once got fairly started, he tells us, he wrote at the rate of a canto a week. It soon exceeded the limits originally proposed for it, and the idea of including it in the third volume of the *Minstrelsy* was given up. Three years passed before it was published; in the first week of January 1805 it appeared and met with a marvellous success, which, as Lockhart says, "at once decided that

literature should form the main business of Scott's life." "It would be great affectation," he says in the Introduction of 1830, "not to own that the author expected some success from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel.* The attempt to return to a more simple and natural poetry was likely to be welcomed, at a time when the public had become tired of heroic hexameters, with all the buckram and binding that belong to them in modern days. But whatever might have been his expectations the result left them far behind; for among those who smiled on the adventurous minstrel were numbered the great names of William Pitt and Charles Fox. Neither was the extent of the sale inferior to the character of the judges who received the poem with approbation. Upward of thirty thousand copies were disposed of by the trade; and the author had to perform a task difficult to human vanity, when called upon to make the necessary deductions from his own merits, in a calm attempt to account for its popularity."

If we, for our part, attempt to account for its popularity we cannot do better than take some of Scott's own words, written at a later date, concerning his work as a whole. "I am sensible," he says, "that if there be anything good about my poetry or prose either, it is a hurried frankness of composition, which pleases soldiers, sailors, and young people of bold and active dispositions." It is this "hurried frankness" that carries Scott's verse along like a company of gallant soldiers marching with easy swinging stride through a fair country, the rhythmical beat of their feet bringing vague suggestions of war and perilous adventure. It is almost impossible to read even the less exciting passages quite calmly and deliberately. There is no poetry so easy to learn by heart, for sound and sense are so welded in that pulsing measure that if we once fairly get the tune started, the words must follow.

The broad, simple outlines of Scott's poetry, its entire freedom from subtlety or obscurity, its free, open-air tone and robust romanticism are among the other qualities that have made it so widely popular.

After the publication of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* Scott's career was simply a triumphal march to fame and wealth. In

1808 *Marmion*—for which the publishers had paid one thousand pounds without seeing it—was published, and its success even exceeded that of the *Lay*. In 1810 came *The Lady of the Lake*, and in 1811 *The Vision of Don Roderick*. In 1812 Scott removed from Ashestiel to Abbotsford, an estate on the banks of the Tweed, which, by an enormous expenditure of time, pains, and money, he afterward developed into the magnificent country seat that he hoped would be the inheritance of a long line of descendants. In December of the same year came *Rokeby*, followed early in 1813 by *The Bridal of Triermain*.

Scott's popularity, witnessed by the sale of his poems, now began to show some signs of waning. Byron's *Childe Harold* (1812) was occupying the attention of the reading public, and partly for this reason, partly because he felt the need of a new method of expression, Scott turned his attention to novel-writing. *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* was published anonymously in February 1814. Scott's own account of the origin and progress of this work is the best that can be given. "It was a very old attempt of mine," he wrote to a friend, Mr Morritt, "to attempt to embody some traits of those characters and manners peculiar to Scotland, the last remnants of which vanished during my own youth, so that few or no traces now remain. I had written great part of the first volume, and sketched other passages, when I mislaid the MS., and only found it by the merest accident as I was rummaging the drawers of an old cabinet; and I took the fancy of finishing it, which I did so fast that the last two volumes were written in three weeks. I had a great deal of fun in the accomplishment of this task, though I do not expect that it will be popular in the south, as much of the humour, if there be any, is local, and some of it even professional. You, however, who are an adopted Scotchman, will find some amusement in it. It has made a very strong impression here, and the good people of Edinburgh are busied in tracing the author, and in finding out originals for the portraits it contains. In the first case they will probably find it difficult to convict the guilty author, although he is far from escaping suspicion. Jeffrey has offered to make

oath that it is mine, and another critic has tendered his affidavit *ex contrario* ; so that these authorities have divided the Gude Town. However, the thing has succeeded very well, and is thought highly of. I don't know if it has got to London yet. I intend to maintain my incognito."

The date of the early sketch referred to in this letter is 1805, and the story of *Waverley*, as may be gathered from its sub-title, deals with the Jacobite rising of 1745. The book had an instant and wonderful success, and inaugurated a second series of triumphs for Scott.

It is impossible here to do more than name the series of novels which followed *Waverley* with such marvellous rapidity. In 1815 *Guy Mannering* was published, almost simultaneously with a long poem, *Lord of the Isles*. In 1816 came *The Antiquary*, *Old Mortality*, and *The Black Dwarf* ; in 1817 *Rob Roy* ; in 1818 *The Heart of Midlothian*. *The Bride of Lammermoor*, *The Legend of Montrose*, *Ivanhoe*, *The Monastery*, *The Abbot*, *Kenilworth*, *The Pirate*, *The Fortunes of Nigel*, *Peveril of the Peak*, *Quentin Durward*, *St Ronan's Well*, *Redgauntlet*, *The Talisman*, and *The Betrothed* all came by 1825, which year saw Scott at the height of his prosperity. In 1820 a baronetcy had been bestowed upon him. The secret of the authorship of the Waverley Novels was by this time a secret no longer, though Scott's friends still joked with him about the Great Unknown. The house he had built at Abbotsford was finished, and furnished with so many rare and curious things that it was almost like a museum. Successive purchases of land had made Scott the owner of a large estate, and this he had planted and improved with the utmost care. His hospitality was lavish, and his charities immense. He had won large sums of money so easily that he seemed to own a Fortunatus' purse, which could never fail. He had not given up the profession of the law, and now held offices which brought him in about fifteen hundred pounds a year, independent of his income from literature. But notwithstanding the great sums he had received, money difficulties which had been pressing more or less heavily upon him for some years, brought him in January 1826 to disaster. He had associated himself with the publishing firm of Ballantyne, and when this

firm, partly through mismanagement, partly through trade depression, failed, he found himself liable for about one hundred and thirty thousand pounds.

He met misfortune magnificently. He refused to become bankrupt, and at fifty-four years of age set to work to achieve what seemed an impossibility—the payment of this huge debt. Amid domestic affliction—for Lady Scott was lying near to death—he began his task. In two months he produced *Woodstock*, one of the finest of his works, and this brought in eight thousand pounds. In April Lady Scott died ; yet he worked on, undaunted. In 1827 appeared his great *Life of Napoleon* and the first series of his *Tales of a Grandfather*. These enabled him to pay his creditors a dividend of six shillings in the pound. In two years he had earned forty thousand pounds. He went on with unabated energy, and in 1828 produced his *Fair Maid of Perth*, and began to prepare, and write prefaces for, a collected edition of his works. In 1829 came *Anne of Geierstein*. By this time his health was giving way under the strain of hard and continuous work and many sorrows. Early in 1830 he suffered from a slight paralytic seizure, but immediately on his recovery he began a new novel, *Count Robert of Paris*. Apoplectic attacks at the end of 1830 and the beginning of 1831 brought him to a pitiable condition of health, but he would not give up his work though his brain-power was seriously affected, and the new book, *Castle Dangerous*, which he persisted in putting in hand, has little of his old charm. Toward the end of 1831 the Government offered him a frigate for a voyage to Italy, and his friends, with a last hope that complete rest and change might even then restore him, persuaded him to undertake the voyage. But his health did not improve, and he grew restless away from his native country. In July 1832 he returned home to Abbotsford, and there on September 17 he died.

XX

THE ESSAYS OF ELIA

THE *Essays of Elia* appeared between August 1820 and August 1825 in *The London Magazine*—a monthly newspaper to which, at some time during the five years of its existence, Keats, Hazlitt, Carlyle, and De Quincey, as well as Charles Lamb, were contributors. Lamb, in 1820, was forty-five years old, and the author of various published works. But it was in *The Essays of Elia* that he found the literary form best suited to his unique powers ; it is through them that he has gained his place among the great English prose-writers. It is in them, also, that he has told the story of a life, poor and mean in its outward circumstances, but so darkened by tragedy and illumined by genius that it can never be commonplace. Many subjects are dealt with in the essays, but there are few of them which are not to some extent autobiographical. We will let Elia tell the story of Charles Lamb, for no one else can tell it half so well.

"I was born," he says, "and passed the first seven years of my life in the Temple. Its church, its halls, its gardens, its fountain, its river, I had almost said—for in those young years what was this king of rivers but a stream that watered our pleasant places ? These are of my oldest recollections." Lamb's father was a confidential servant or clerk of Samuel Salt, one of the Benchers of the Temple. His son describes him under the name of Lovel. "I knew this Lovel," he says. "He was a man of an incorrigible and losing honesty. A good fellow withal, and 'would strike.' In the cause of the oppressed he never considered inequalities, or calculated the number of his opponents."

The home in the Temple was a very humble one. "Snug firesides—the low-built roof—parlours ten feet by ten—frugal boards and all the homeliness of home—these were the con-

dition of my birth—the wholesome soil which I was planted in." But the boy was not without experience of a home of more magnificent sort. His grandmother was housekeeper at the old mansion of the Plumer family, at Blakesware in Hertfordshire, and, when the owners were absent, Charles Lamb with his elder brother and sister often paid her long visits. All the grandeur and beauty of the dwelling he felt to be his own. Many a time, he tells us, he has gone over the gallery of old portraits giving them his own family name, at which they would "seem to smile, reaching forward from the canvas to recognize the new relationship."

"Mine, too, was thy noble Marble Hall with its Mosaic pavements and its Twelve Cæsars—stately busts in marble—ranged round. . . . Mine, too—whose else? thy costly fruit garden, with its sun-baked southern wall; the ampler pleasure garden rising backwards from the house in triple terraces . . . the verdant quarters backwarder still; and, stretching still beyond in old formality, the firry wilderness, the haunt of the squirrel, and the day-long murmuring wood-pigeon."

The imaginative gift by means of which the poor clerk's son entered upon so rich a heritage, opened to him also the regions of torment. "I was dreadfully alive," he tells us, "to nervous terrors. . . . I never laid my head on my pillow, I suppose, from the fourth to the seventh or eighth year of my life—so far as memory serves in things so long ago—without an assurance, which realized its own prophecy, of seeing some frightful spectre."

When Charles Lamb was seven years old his father's employer, Samuel Salt, obtained for him a presentation to the famous school of Christ's Hospital. In the same year Coleridge came up from Ottery St Mary. The gentle, nervous little London lad, with his stammering tongue, and his keen, observant eyes was attracted at once by the wonderful qualities of his precocious schoolfellow. "Come back into memory," cries Elia, "like as thou wert in the dayspring of thy fancies, with hope like a fiery column before thee—the dark pillar not yet turned—Samuel Taylor Coleridge—Logician, Metaphysician, Bard." The two boys, both so different from the others round them, formed a friendship which lasted for

more than fifty years, and was one of the happiest influences in the lives of each. Coleridge has told of the old boyish days in his *Biographia Literaria* and Lamb in his essay on *Christ's Hospital Five-and-Thirty Years Ago.* He speaks here as in the person of Coleridge. "I remember L. at school, and can well recollect that he had some peculiar advantages which I and others of his schoolfellows had not. His friends lived in town, and were near at hand; and he had the privilege of going to see them, almost as often as he wished, through some invidious distinction, which was denied to us. . . . He had his hot plate of roast veal, or the more tempting griskin (exotics unknown to our palates), cooked in the paternal kitchen (a great thing), and brought him daily by his maid or aunt! I remember the good old relative (in whom love forbade pride) squatting down upon some odd stone in a by-nook of the cloisters, disclosing the viands (of higher regale than those cates which the ravens ministered to the Tishbite); and the contending passions of L. at the unfolding. There was love for the bringer; shame for the thing brought, and the manner of its bringing; sympathy for those who were too many to share in it; and, at top of all, hunger (eldest, strongest of the passions!) predominant, breaking down the stony fences of shame, and awkwardness, and a troubling over-consciousness."

At Christ's Hospital Lamb received a thorough classical education. He was never a good Greek scholar, but attained to very considerable proficiency in Latin, which he wrote with great ease. His schooldays were probably the happiest of his life, and when the time came for him to leave Christ's Hospital we can imagine how sorrowfully he parted from the friends and the places endeared to him by seven years of close association. Coleridge was going to Jesus College, Cambridge, but for Charles Lamb no such extension of the student's life was possible. He was, as Elia wrote afterward in his essay on *Oxford in the Vacation,* "defrauded in his young years of the sweet food of academic institution" by the poverty of his family. His father was growing old and infirm; his elder brother, John, had obtained a responsible position in a South Sea House, had left home and did little to

help his family. His sister Mary, then about twenty-four years old, looked after the three old people—father, mother, and the Aunt Hetty whose visits to Lamb in his schooldays have been recorded—and tried, by working with her needle, to add something to the scanty family income. It was necessary that Charles also should help, and soon after he left school he obtained, as his brother had done, a post in the South Sea House. He stayed there only a short time. In 1792, through the influence of Samuel Salt, he was promoted to the accountant's office of the East India Company at a salary of seventy pounds a year. From this time forward he became the chief support of his family. His father, in the same year, was obliged through increasing age and infirmity to give up the few duties in the service of Samuel Salt which he had hitherto retained, and retired on a small annuity. The family removed from the Temple to rooms in Little Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. There began for Charles Lamb the life of monotonous drudgery and heavy care which was to last for so many years. It was varied only by occasional meetings with Coleridge, and by holiday visits to Hertfordshire. At Hertfordshire Lamb fell in love with a "fair-haired maid" of whom we know little except what he tells us in two sonnets written between 1792 and 1796, and in his beautiful essay, *Dream Children*, written many years later. There he describes how the two shadowy little ones stood at his knee while he told them "how for seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever," he "courted the fair Alice W——n"; and how the dream died, and the children who for a time had seemed his own faded away, their mournful, receding features strangely impressing upon him the effects of speech. "We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. . . . We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence and a name."

The "might have been" was never to be for Charles Lamb. An obstacle more insurmountable even than poverty, and much more terrible, stood between him and thoughts of love or marriage. In the early part of the year 1796 he wrote to Coleridge: "My life has been somewhat diversified of late.

The six weeks that finished last year and began this, your very humble servant spent very agreeably in a madhouse at Hoxton. . . . Coleridge, it may convince you of my regard for you when I tell you my head ran on you in my madness, as much almost as on another person, who I am inclined to think was the more immediate cause of my temporary frenzy." The "other person" was, doubtless, Alice W——n; and so ended the romance of Lamb's life. Its great tragedy was soon to follow. Insanity, it appears, was hereditary in the family, and it attacked next the kind elder sister, the sensible, quiet, patient, and hard-working Mary Lamb. She had been to Charles almost as a mother, and he loved and leant upon her as on one stronger and wiser than himself. We can judge in what agony of spirit he wrote, in September 1796, the letter to Coleridge telling how the blow had fallen.

"My Dearest Friend,—White or some of my friends, or the public papers by this time, may have informed you of the terrible calamities that have fallen on our family. My poor, dear, dearest sister, in a fit of insanity, has been the death of her own mother. I was at hand only time enough to snatch the knife out of her grasp. She is at present in a madhouse, from whence I fear she must be moved to a hospital. God has preserved to me my senses—I eat, and drink, and sleep, and have my judgment, I believe, very sound. My poor father was slightly wounded, and I am left to take care of him and my aunt. Mr Norris, of the Bluecoat School, has been very kind to us, and we have no other friend; but, thank God, I am very calm and composed, and able to do the best that remains to do. Write as religious a letter as possible, but no mention of what is gone and done with. With me the 'former things are passed away,' and I have something more to do than feel.

"God Almighty have us well in His keeping.

"C. Lamb"

The young man of twenty-two, himself conscious of an infirmity which might at any time reduce him to the condition of his unfortunate sister, acted at this terrible crisis

with the greatest calmness and judgment. The care of the whole family fell upon him; and he took up the burden quietly and bravely. Mary, he resolved, should have everything that he could give her. "We have, Daddy and I, for our two selves and an old maid-servant to look after him when I am out, which will be necessary, £170 or £180 rather a year, out of which we can spare £50 or £60 for Mary while she stays at Islington, where she must and shall stay during her father's life, for his and her comfort. . . . If my father, an old servant-maid, and I can't live, and live comfortably, on £130 or £140 a year, we ought to burn by slow fires; and I almost would, that Mary might not go into an hospital."

It was not long, however, that this state of things continued. A few months passed and the poor old father was dead, and Aunt Hetty soon followed him. Charles was free now to devote himself to his sister, and he did it with entire singleness of heart. She had by this time recovered from her attack, and her brother at once set about making arrangements for her to be confided to his care. Upon certain conditions and undertakings this was done; and the brother and sister went home together to begin the life of mutual love and watchfulness which lasted for thirty-five years. Mary Lamb's attacks of insanity recurred more and more frequently as the years went on, but fortunately she always felt warning symptoms that told her when the time had come for a return to the asylum at Hoxton. A friend has related how he once met the two walking hand in hand on this sad errand, the faithful brother leading the weeping but willing sister to her temporary imprisonment.

On this great tragedy of Charles Lamb's life "Elia" is silent. Only indirectly in the sad notes that are struck even in his tenderest and most delightfully humorous passages can some echo of it be heard. But of the sister, so loved and so pitied, and of the life the two led together, the essays tell us much. Mary appears as Elia's cousin, Bridget. "Bridget Elia," says one of the essays, "has been my housekeeper for many a long year. I have obligations to Bridget, extending beyond the period of memory. We house together, old bachelor and maid, in a sort of double singleness; with such

tolerable comfort, upon the whole, that I, for one, find in myself no sort of disposition to go out upon the mountains, with the rash king's offspring, to bewail my celibacy. . . . Her education in youth was not much attended to; and she happily missed all that train of female garniture which passeth by the name of accomplishments. She was tumbled early, by accident or design, into a spacious closet of good old English reading, without much selection or prohibition, and browsed at will upon that fair and wholesome pasturage. Had I twenty girls, they should be brought up exactly in this fashion. I know not whether their chance in wedlock might not be diminished by it, but I can answer for it that it makes (if the worst come to the worst) most incomparable old maids."

The "spacious closet of good old English reading" was probably the library of Samuel Salt, and here Lamb himself had "browsed at will" during his childhood. Here he had learnt to know and love those old Elizabethan writers whose works had gone so completely out of fashion during the eighteenth century, and whom he reintroduced to the English reading public by means of his *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets contemporary with Shakespeare* (1808).

The brother and sister made various efforts to increase their very scanty income by means of literary work. For about three years Lamb contributed facetious paragraphs to the morning papers, at the rate of sixpence a joke. "O those headaches at dawn of day, when at five, or half-past five in summer, and not much later in the dark seasons, we were compelled to rise, having been perhaps not above four hours in bed—for we were no go-to-beds with the lamb, though we anticipated the lark ofttimes in her rising. . . . No Egyptian taskmaster ever devised a slavery like to that, our slavery. . . . Half a dozen jests in a day (bating Sundays too), why it seems nothing! We make twice the number every day in our lives as a matter of course, and claim no Sabbatical exemptions. But then they come into our head. But when the head has to go out to them—when the mountain must go to Mahomet—Reader, try it for once, only for one short twelvemonth."

Charles Lamb
Lionel Heath

Samuel Taylor Coleridge
Washington Allston, A.R.A.
Photo Emery Walker, Ltd.

William Wordsworth
Lionel Heath

Lamb published also some poems (1796) and a story, *Rosamund Gray* (1798), neither of which brought him any substantial money return. In 1802 appeared his poetic drama *John Woodvil*, which was very harshly handled by *The Edinburgh Review*; in 1805 he wrote a farce, *Mr H.*, which he himself joined in hissing off the stage. His first success was gained with the *Tales from Shakespeare*, 1807, the joint work of himself and his sister; his second with the *Specimens* of 1808. In 1820 came his crowning triumph with the first of *The Essays of Elia*. All this work was done in the scanty leisure that his duties at the East India House allowed him; and even these hours were not entirely at his own disposal. They were taken up, he complains, by intrusive acquaintances. "I am never C. L. but always C. L. and Co. He who thought it not good for man to be alone, preserve me from the more prodigious monstrosity of never being by myself."

For the annoyance caused by this too constant stream of visitors Lamb was himself very largely to blame. He was naturally of a sociable and convivial temperament, and his gentle nature found it difficult to snub or repulse even the most tiresome acquaintance. The monotony of his life, the constant strain involved in his watchful care of his sister, the agony and loneliness that attended her frequent absences at the asylum—all drove him to find relief and distraction in the means nearest at hand. He had many friends whom he truly loved and honoured. His friendship with Coleridge remained unbroken; Wordsworth, Southey, Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt were among others who were often to be found at his poor lodgings on those famous Wednesday evenings when the Lambs kept open house. But there came also a crowd of less worthy associates in whose company Charles sometimes fell from that better self that we all know and love. The evenings ended, as his patient sister often had to confess, in Charles being "very smoky and drinky." The temptation to take more wine than was good for him was a very strong one, for wine unloosed his stammering tongue from its bonds and made him able to talk freely, eloquently, gloriously. But all his lapses were followed by deep penitence, and Mary, the

kind mother-sister, never lost patience or hope. As Charles watched over her so she watched over him, comforted and encouraged him, calmed his excitable, sensitive nature by her quiet good sense, and kept him, as far as was possible, true to the inspiration of his genius.

As the years went on the circumstances of the brother and sister improved. By 1823 Lamb's salary had risen to about seven hundred pounds a year, and his gains from literature were also considerable. Though generous in the extreme, neither Charles nor his sister was reckless. Even in the days of their greatest poverty they had kept out of debt. Now they began to enjoy some of the pleasures that come with easy circumstances. In August 1823 they took a house at Islington which, although it was then a country district, was yet near enough to Charles's beloved London to enable him often to visit the scenes so dear to his heart. "Enchanting London," he had written years before to his friend Manning, "whose dirtiest, drab-frequented alley, and her lowest bowing tradesman, I would not exchange for Skiddaw, Helvellyn. . . . All the streets and pavements are pure gold, I warrant you. At least, I know an alchemy that turns her mud into that metal—a mind that loves to be at home in crowds."

In April 1825 came Lamb's emancipation from the drudgery of the East India Office. The directors marked their appreciation of his long and faithful service, as well as of his literary reputation, by offering him an immediate retiring allowance of two-thirds of his salary—"a magnificent offer," says Lamb. "I do not know what I answered between surprise and gratitude, but it was understood that I accepted their proposal, and I was told that I was free from that hour to leave their service. I stammered out a bow, and at just ten minutes after eight I went home—for ever. . . . For the first day or two I felt stunned, overwhelmed. I could only apprehend my felicity; I was too confused to taste it sincerely. I wandered about thinking I was happy, and knowing I was not. I was in the condition of a prisoner in the old Bastile, suddenly let loose after a forty years' confinement. . . . Now that those giddy raptures have subsided, I have a quiet home-feeling of the blessedness of my condition. I am

in no hurry. Having all holidays, I am as though I had none."

The years that followed were calm, though clouded, and there is little to tell about them except with regard to changes of residence, loss of friends, and the steady increase of Mary Lamb's infirmity. "Mary is ill again," he wrote to Wordsworth in 1833, from Bay Cottage, Edmonton, where he was then living. "Her illnesses encroach yearly. The last was three months, followed by two of depression most dreadful. I look back upon her earlier attacks with longing. Nice little durations of six weeks or so, followed by complete restoration, shocking as they were to me then. In short, half her life is dead to me, and the other half is made anxious with fears, and lookings forward to the next shock."

A few fugitive papers are all that remain to mark this last ten years of Lamb's life. His period of literary activity was over. He occupied his time in reading, in walking, and in visiting such old friends as remained to him. His frail form had grown thinner than ever, his "almost immaterial legs," as Hood had called them, had dwindled to even greater attenuation. But the noble head with its dark hair and broad open brow still redeemed his appearance from insignificance, and his brown eyes were as soft and bright as they had been in his boyhood's days. The smile, sad, tender, and sweet, of which his friends have loved to tell us, still came and went, and the gentle air of patient endurance which the sorrows of his life had brought to him was still sometimes lightened by the flash of merry humour or kindly raillery. His heart was constant to its old friendships. The death of Coleridge in July 1834 gave him a blow from which he could not recover. For many years the genius of Coleridge had been under a cloud. The fatal instability of his character joined to the long-indulged habit of opium-taking had wrecked his marvellous powers. But to Charles Lamb he was still the Coleridge of *The Ancient Mariner* and of *Christabel*. "His great and dear spirit still haunts me. I cannot think a thought, I cannot make a criticism on men or books without an ineffectual turning and reference to him. He was the proof and touchstone of all my cogitations."

Before five months had passed Lamb had gone to join his friend. On a cold December afternoon, as he was taking his lonely walk along the London road, thinking sadly of Coleridge dead, and Mary away in the asylum, he slipped and fell, slightly wounding his face. Erysipelas set in, and on December 29, 1834, he died.

XXI

VANITY FAIR

WHEN Queen Victoria came to the throne a new era in prose fiction was opening. Thackeray, a young man of twenty-six, was writing his first story, *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*; Dickens, a few months younger, was already known as the author of *Pickwick*, which was running its triumphal course in a series of monthly numbers; Charlotte Brontë, just turned twenty-one, was toiling wearily as a governess, not without thoughts of authorship; George Eliot, a girl of seventeen, was looking after her father's house at Arbury in Warwickshire; George Meredith was a boy of nine years. These are the giants among the great company of Victorian novelists. Within the space of forty years after the Queen's accession were produced all those masterpieces of prose fiction that have made the age famous: and the same period witnessed the publication of the finest works of Tennyson and Browning, of Macaulay's *History*, of the *Cromwell* and *Frederick the Great* of Carlyle, and the *Modern Painters* of Ruskin.

William Makepeace Thackeray, the eldest of the band of novelists, was born in 1811. He belonged to a family that for several generations had been connected with Indian trade. He was born in Calcutta, and when he was six years old was sent home to England. At eleven he entered the Charterhouse School, which is the "Slaughterhouse" and "Grey Friars" of several of his novels. Here he did not greatly distinguish himself. Like the hero of *Pendennis* he was "averse to the Greek Grammar from his earliest youth, and would have none of it except at the last extremity." "He never read to improve himself out of school hours, but, on the contrary, devoured all the novels, plays and poetry on which he could lay his hands. . . . He had a natural taste for reading every

possible kind of book which did not fall into his school-course. It was only when they forced his head into the waters of knowledge that he refused to drink."

This natural taste for reading remained with Thackeray all his life long. When he went up to Cambridge in 1829 he was brought into sympathy with the famous little group of students to which Tennyson and Edward Fitzgerald belonged, and with several members of this group he formed lifelong friendships. When he left college in 1830 he spent some time abroad, chiefly at Paris and Weimar. At Paris he studied drawing, with the idea of becoming an artist. From his childhood he had used his pencil with ease and skill, and his caricatures had been the delight of his schoolfellows at the Charterhouse. The examples of his drawings that remain to us show that he had a rare talent for giving life and animation to the figures in his sketches, that he could catch an expression and illustrate an incident with great aptness. But he never learned to draw correctly—perhaps because he never really worked hard enough. It is strange that he should have been so entirely mistaken at this period of his life as to the true nature of his talents.

In 1832 he came into possession of the considerable fortune left to him by his father, who had died in 1816. This he soon contrived to get rid of. He had formed expensive habits, he was generous to an extreme degree, and neither at this time nor at any later period of his life possessed what may be called the financial faculty. He lost large sums in an attempt to start a daily newspaper, and by 1833 it became necessary for him to set to work in earnest to gain a living. Still with the idea of becoming an artist, he again took up his studies in Paris. In 1836, when in consequence of the death of the original artist the publishers of *Pickwick* were in immediate need of an illustrator for the remaining numbers of the work, Thackeray was among the applicants for the vacant post. He submitted drawings, which, as he said humorously in after-life, "you will be surprised to hear Mr Dickens did not consider suitable for his purpose." The stress of his necessitous circumstances drove him at length to literature. He became Paris correspondent to a paper called *The Constitutional*,

and so gradually drifted into journalistic work. In 1836 he married, but in less than four years his wife became lost to him through the most terrible of misfortunes. An illness caused by a lesion of the brain so far destroyed her mental powers that it became at last evident, even to her husband, that there was no hope of recovery, and that separation must take place. Thackeray was left alone, save for his three baby girls. His home was full of sad memories, and it was at this time that he formed the habit of living largely at his clubs, a habit which remained with him to the end of his life.

Through all his misfortunes he kept a brave face, and was even considered by some of his friends to show an unbecoming callousness. He worked hard at journalism, and wrote for *Fraser's Magazine* the now famous *Yellowplush Papers.* In 1837 and 1838 his *Great Hoggarty Diamond* appeared in monthly instalments, but it was coldly received by the public. About 1841 he first became connected with *Punch,* for which he wrote many delightful papers and poems. *The Snob Papers, Novels by Eminent Hands, The Ballads of Policeman X,* are among his contributions. In 1844–46 came the tale, perfect in its kind, of *Barry Lyndon,* and in 1845–46 *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo.*

But in all these efforts Thackeray failed somehow to hit the public taste. He was known to his brother journalists and to literary men in general, and was respected as a man of brilliant and versatile talents. But the great British public that was throughout these years acclaiming each novel of Dickens as it issued from the press with the loudest of praises, and buying thousands of copies, knew little of Thackeray. This was, in part, his own fault. He was constitutionally indolent, and the sustained effort necessary for the production of a really long and serious work was very distasteful to him. He preferred the short papers and ballads that gave him little trouble, but which gave him also only a passing reputation, and a return in money sufficient only to the needs of the day. He scattered the treasures of his imagination and his wit with a lavish hand in fugitive papers contributed to various magazines, in impromptu verses written for his

friends, in brilliant talk at his club. Anthony Trollope tells us that when he began to write a life of Thackeray he asked a number of those who had known the great writer if they could give him any particulars concerning his career at this period. From all he received the same type of answer, "If I could only tell you the impromptu lines that fell from him!" "If I had only kept the drawings from his pen, which used to be chucked about as though they were worth nothing!" "If I could only remember the drolleries!" In general society Thackeray did not shine, but with a few intimate friends he was the most delightful of companions.

But underneath all this outward glitter there was, in Thackeray's nature, a deep vein of melancholy. The buoyant hopefulness of Charles Dickens was as foreign to him as was the indomitable perseverance which was carrying his friend and rival so far ahead in the race for fame. Life seemed to him to be full of hardship and of pain; and since whining over these did not become a man the only thing to do was to cover up one's wounds with a jest, and turn for consolation to those passing joys that were all the world could offer. It is this attitude toward life that has sometimes caused Thackeray to be regarded as a cynic, but no cynic ever had a heart as large and tender as was his. Only it seemed to him useless to attempt to represent things as better than they really were. Much of the literature of the day he thought poor and futile because the writers had painted men as it was pleasant to imagine them to be rather than as they were. The heroes of fiction, even of Dickens's fiction, he considered as mere concessions to popular taste. "Since the author of *Tom Jones* was buried," he wrote in one of his later books, "no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a MAN. We must drape him, and give him a certain conventional simper." This Thackeray resolved that he himself would not do. "I can't help telling the truth," he says, "as I view it, and describing what I see. To describe it otherwise than it seems to me would be falsehood in that calling in which it has pleased Heaven to place me; treason to that conscience which says that men are weak; that truth must be told; that faults must be owned; that

pardon must be prayed for; and that Love reigns supreme over all."

It was in this spirit that Thackeray early in 1846 began to write the work that was to make him famous. During part of 1846, the whole of 1847 and the first half of 1848 novel readers in England had two great treats to look forward to in each month. There was the instalment of *Dombey and Son*, in the green wrapper then so familiar to readers of Dickens's works, and there was the new novel, *Vanity Fair*, which, with the name of William Makepeace Thackeray on its canary-coloured cover, was making the name of Becky Sharp a household word. It was to Becky Sharp that the great popularity of the book was mainly due. Thackeray called it "a novel without a hero," and it is certain that the three characters who might have aspired to fill the hero's place, George Osborne, Major Dobbin, and Rawdon Crawley, are completely overshadowed by this amazing heroine. She is a heroine of an entirely new type, neither beautiful nor good nor clever, except with that kind of cleverness that tends to worldly advancement. Thackeray shows us exactly how little she is, and makes us realize with how small a capital she starts out to make her fortune. The way in which she does it has all the excitement that attaches to the achievement of the apparently impossible. Amelia, the rival heroine, has generally been described by critics as a model of insipidity, but this is scarcely fair. By the side of Becky she seems commonplace, but she is in reality a sweet and natural girl, such a one, Mr Trollope says, as any father might wish his daughter to be.

The first numbers of *Vanity Fair* attracted public attention, and as the story went on its fame gathered. It was the first of all Thackeray's works which he had signed with his own name. Hitherto he had been Mr C. James Yellowplush, or Michael Angelo Titmarsh, or Fitzboodle, or Ikey Solomon. Now the world began to know William Makepeace Thackeray. He was sought after by fashionable society, and extolled in the newspapers. Strangers, when they met at some great dinner-party or other social function a tall, rather portly man of noble presence, with a fine open forehead, flowing hair

that was rapidly turning grey, and a broken nose, recognized him at once as the new literary lion. The broken nose was a memento of an occasion, famous in the annals of the Charterhouse, when two small boys of eleven, William Makepeace Thackeray and George Stovin Venables, settled their little differences after the manner approved of boys, before a large and delighted assembly of their schoolfellows. But the injury he there received rather added to than took away from the distinction of Thackeray's appearance in his later years. It certainly did not prevent his becoming a hero to many of those who read his books, and the worship tendered by these admirers sometimes, we are told, caused him serious embarrassment. Charlotte Brontë in her remote Yorkshire home read *Vanity Fair* and appreciated it after her intense and serious fashion. Her own book, *Jane Eyre*, had been published in October 1847, and in the second edition, 1848, she inserted a dedication to Thackeray. She looked upon him, she said, "as the social regenerator of his day—as the very master of that working corps who would restore to rectitude the warped state of things." "His wit is bright," she continued, "his humour attractive, but both bear the same relation to his serious genius, that the mere lambent sheet-lightning, playing under the edge of the summer cloud, does to the electric death-spark hid in its womb."

The success of *Vanity Fair* gave to Thackeray just the stimulus he required. His lack of self-confidence had prevented him from working freely and easily, but now he set to work in a more buoyant spirit. His next novel, *Pendennis* (1848–50), which is to some extent autobiographical, shows this clearly, especially in its opening chapters. In 1852 came *Esmond*, usually considered to be his masterpiece, and in 1854 *The Newcomes*, memorable for that character whom every reader of Thackeray loves, dear old Colonel Thomas Newcome.

This was the happiest period of Thackeray's life. His daughters had grown old enough to be his companions, and he loved them tenderly and delighted in their society. Home became something like home once more, though he still continued to frequent the clubs to which he had grown accustomed, and of which he was such an honoured member. The

consciousness that he could make an adequate provision for his daughters lightened the burden of care which in the old hand-to-mouth days had lain so heavily upon him. Thackeray never grew rich. He was too careless of money and too lavishly generous for that. But he reached a position which raised him above the constant fret that comes from means insufficient for daily needs. He never became industrious. The printer was sometimes waiting for an instalment of his book when that instalment was scarcely begun. But until ill-health was added to constitutional indolence he managed to keep abreast of his work without too obvious a strain. In 1851 he made his first appearance as a lecturer, and delivered a course of lectures upon *The English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century*, which had an immense success. Other courses, given at home and in America, followed, and brought in large sums of money. In 1857 he began *The Virginians*, a continuation of *Esmond*, whose monthly numbers ran until October 1859. In the following year he became editor of *The Cornhill Magazine*. This, from the financial point of view, was Thackeray's most successful undertaking. The sale of the magazine was almost unprecedented, and its editor's jubilant letters show how keenly he enjoyed the triumph. He contributed to it his *Lovel the Widower*, *Philip*, and the delightful *Roundabout Papers*. With the money that the paper brought him he built for himself a grand new house at Palace Green, Kensington, where he entertained both the world of fashion and the world of literature. But his infirmities were growing upon him, and the attacks of spasms to which he had for years been subject came with alarming frequency. On Christmas Eve 1863 his servant carried to his bedside his morning cup of chocolate, and found him lying dead. "Others may walk down to the pier with us," he had said in a letter to a friend, "but we must make the voyage alone." He had made his voyage now, and his great spirit was at rest on the farther shore.

Thackeray was buried at Kensal Green, and a bust to his memory was placed in Westminster Abbey. Many tributes, in verse and prose, appeared in the periodicals of the day. Dickens wrote in *All the Year Round*, and Lord Houghton in

the *Cornhill.* But the truest and tenderest tribute came from his old friend *Punch*, in the form of a poem written by Mr Tom Taylor. This, although it is so well known as to be almost hackneyed, can scarcely be quoted too often, and we will give it here :

He was a cynic ! By his life all wrought
Of generous acts, mild words, and gentle ways ;
His heart wide open to all kindly thought,
His hand so quick to give, his tongue to praise.

He was a cynic ! You might read it writ
In that broad brow, crowned with its silver hair ;
In those blue eyes, with childlike candour lit,
In that sweet smile his lips were wont to wear !

He was a cynic ! By the love that clung
About him from his children, friends, and kin ;
By the sharp pain, light pen and gossip tongue
Wrought in him, chafing the soft heart within.

XXII

DAVID COPPERFIELD

IT will be easily believed," wrote Charles Dickens, "that I am a fond parent to every child of my fancy, and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I love them. But, like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child—and his name is David Copperfield." Most of Dickens's readers share his partiality for this favourite child. It is neither his eldest nor his youngest born, but belongs to that middle period which saw the fullness of his powers. When he began to write it he was thirty-seven years old, and the idol of the English reading public. Already he had produced seven out of the fifteen novels that were to form his main contribution to English literature. *Pickwick Papers* had begun to appear in 1836, and Dickens had followed up this first success with *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840), *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843), *Dombey and Son* (1848). Novel had followed novel in this wonderful series, each so full of characters, incidents, and details, each so abounding in life and high spirits that it seemed as if the entire energies and accumulated observation of the writer must have been expended on one work alone. It was a marvellous achievement, and the man who had so triumphantly accomplished it might well have thought that the time for rest had come. But Dickens's store of energy seemed inexhaustible. No sooner was *Dombey and Son* finished than he plunged into new enterprises. His enthusiasm for the stage was almost as great as his enthusiasm for literature, and from 1847 to 1852 he stage-managed an amateur theatrical company which gave performances in Manchester, Liverpool, and London, had the honour of performing before Queen Victoria, and gathered in large sums for various charities. He was,

moreover, becoming famous as a public speaker, and charitable and educational institutions were eager to secure him for their meetings. To such calls his active spirit of benevolence and his enthusiasm for reform made him give a willing response. Added to this, he founded in 1849 a new periodical, *Household Words*, of which he became the very efficient editor, and to which he regularly contributed. His circle of friends, meanwhile, was growing larger and larger, and his social life fuller and richer. Thackeray was now one of his intimates, and nobody rejoiced at the success of *Vanity Fair* more heartily than did Charles Dickens. So with fun and laughter, with hard work and hard play, each undertaken with equal zest, the days of these happy years went by; and when the busy day was over there were the midnight tramps through the London streets that soothed the fervid brain even while they provided the material for renewed mental activity.

Amid all these occupations and interests the plan of a new work was gradually forming in Dickens's brain. A question concerning his childhood, put to him in March or April 1847 by his friend John Forster, had sent his thoughts backward toward that early time. A little later he gave to his friend —whom even then he regarded as his future biographer— a paper in which he had written an account of his boyish experiences. The memories thus recalled mingled with the thought of the new novel then floating in his brain, and the result was a story which, in many of its details, especially those connected with the early life of the hero, is autobiographical. Passages from the account given to John Forster appear almost without alteration; and although David Copperfield is not to be identified with Charles Dickens, he may be regarded as reflecting to a very large degree his creator's character, disposition, and ambitions.

As was usual with Dickens, he found some difficulty in getting his story fairly started. The choice of a title delayed him for a long time. Forster gives a list of suggestions sent to him, by which it appears that Dickens was strongly in favour of *Mag's Diversions* as the leading phrase. "Mag" was to stand for David's aunt Margaret, who was a prominent figure in Dickens's earliest conception of the story. The hero's

surname also gave some trouble. It arrived at last by way of Trotfield, Trotbury, Copperboy, and Copperstone at Copperfield, and Aunt Margaret developed into Betsey Trotwood. The title then took shape as *The Personal History and Experience of David Copperfield the Younger.*

These preliminaries being satisfactorily settled, the story went merrily on. The first number was published in May 1849. Miss Betsey made her appearance in the first chapter, preceding even the hero, but had scarcely established herself as a public favourite before she disappeared. The chapters which tell of David's earliest years have, except in one or two scattered passages, no foundation in actual fact. Charles Dickens was not an orphan, nor did he live at Blunderstone, near Yarmouth. His father, John Dickens, was a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, and, at the time of the birth of his eldest son, Charles, was living at Landport, a suburb of Portsea. In 1816 he was moved to Chatham, and there he lived until 1823. The boy's early recollections, therefore, were not of the "spongy and soppy" flats of Yarmouth—which indeed Dickens never saw until 1849—but of the pleasant hills and bowery lanes of Kent, the picturesque streets of Rochester, the soldiers in their bright uniforms marching and manœuvring on the open spaces down by the river Medway. But he began his education as David Copperfield began his, through the medium of the "fat black letters in the primer" which his mother taught him at her knee; and, like David, he found comfort for the troubles of his boyhood in a small collection of books belonging to his father, which were stored in a little room upstairs. "From that blessed little room, *Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphry Clinker, Tom Jones, The Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas* and *Robinson Crusoe* came out, a glorious host, to keep me company." This was the most important part of Dickens's early education. What he gained from these books he never lost, and their influence is clearly to be seen in his own literary work.

It is when we approach the Murdstone and Grinby scenes in the life of David Copperfield that the resemblance between his experience and that of Dickens becomes clearly marked.

When Charles Dickens was eleven years old his father removed to London, and the family fell upon evil times. John Dickens was one of those good-natured, incompetent, and incorrigibly hopeful persons whom his son has pictured in Mr Micawber. He was constantly in money difficulties, and these now reached an acute stage. In London the family lived at Bayham Street, Camden Town, then one of the poorest of the suburban districts. To these squalid surroundings the intelligent, sensitive little boy was transplanted. "As I thought," he said, long afterward, "in the little back-garret in Bayham Street, of all I had lost in losing Chatham, what would I have given, if I had had anything to give, to have been sent back to any other school, to have been taught something anywhere!" "I know my father to be as kind-hearted and generous a man as ever lived in the world. . . . But, in the ease of his temper, and the straitness of his means, he appeared to have utterly lost at this time the idea of educating me at all, and to have utterly put from him the notion that I had any claim upon him, in that regard whatever. So I degenerated into cleaning his boots of a morning, and my own; and making myself useful in the work of the little house; and looking after my younger brothers and sisters (we were now six in all); and going on such poor errands as arose out of our poor way of living."

These errands included those pitiful little journeys to the pawnbroker which he has represented David as making on behalf of Mrs Micawber. Other experiences of the Bayham Street household he has narrated in the same connexion. The great brass plate which covered the centre of the front door at Mrs Micawber's house in Windsor Terrace bore a legend similar to that which announced "Mrs Dickens Boarding Establishment for Young Ladies," in Bayham Street. Great hopes had been raised in the boy's breast by the plan of which this brass plate was the symbol; but they came to nothing. "I left," he says, "at a great many other doors, a great many circulars calling attention to the merits of the establishment, yet nobody ever came to the school, nor do I recollect that anybody ever proposed to come, or that the least preparation was made to receive anybody.

George Eliot
Sir F. W. Burton
Photo Emery Walker, Ltd.

W. M. Thackeray
From a photograph

Charles Dickens

Charlotte Brontë
George Richmond
Photo Emery Walker, Ltd.

But I know that we got on very badly with the butcher and baker; that very often we had not too much for dinner; and that at last my father was arrested."

The crisis thus came to John Dickens as it came to Mr Micawber, and the details of the debtors' prison as given in *David Copperfield* are drawn from life. Drawn from life also is the story of David's experiences at the warehouse of Murdstone and Grinby. When John Dickens was taken to prison the family had "encamped, with a young servant-girl from Chatham workhouse in the two parlours of the emptied house," where the furniture had been seized for rent. To this house came one day a relative of the family who was connected with a blacking warehouse lately established at Hungerford Stairs, Strand. He proposed that the little Charles, then eleven years old, should begin work at the blacking factory at a salary of six shillings a week, and his offer was accepted.

Then began for Charles Dickens a period of deep misery and intense humiliation. "It is wonderful to me," he says, "that even after my descent into the poor little drudge I had been since we came to London, no one had compassion enough on me—a child of singular abilities, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt, bodily or mentally—to suggest that something might have been spared, as certainly it might have been, to place me at any common school. Our friends, I take it, were tired out. No one made any sign. My father and mother were quite satisfied. They could hardly have been more so, if I had been twenty years of age, distinguished at a grammar-school, and going to Cambridge.

"The blacking warehouse was the last house on the left-hand side of the way, at old Hungerford Stairs. It was a crazy, tumble-down old house, abutting, of course, on the river, and literally overrun with rats. Its wainscoted rooms, and its rotten floors and staircase, and the old grey rats swarming down in the cellars, and the sound of their squeaking and scuffling coming up the stairs at all times, and the dirt and decay of the place, rise up visibly before me, as if I were there again." Here he was employed in tying up pots of blacking and pasting labels upon them.

"No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I . . . felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my breast. The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be bought back any more; cannot be written."

After a time Mrs Dickens, with the family, moved into the prison, and then lodgings were taken for Charles in a neighbouring street. Sundays he spent in the prison. The rent of this lodging was paid by his father; for all other necessities the child had to depend upon his poor weekly wage. The shifts and straits of David Copperfield, the scanty dinners, the reckless indulgence in stale pastry, the birthday treat of a glass of the "Genuine Stunning" ale—all these things belong to the history of Charles Dickens. "I know," he said, in the account that he wrote for his friend, "I do not exaggerate, unconsciously and unintentionally, the scantiness of my resources and the difficulties of my life. I know that if a shilling or so were given me by anyone, I spent it in a dinner or a tea. I know that I worked, from morning to night, with common men and boys, a shabby child. I know that I tried, but ineffectually, not to anticipate my money, and to make it last the week through; by putting it away in a drawer I had in the counting-house, wrapped into six little parcels, each parcel containing the same amount, and labelled with a different day. I know that I have lounged about the streets, insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond."

Dickens did not, as David did, run away from the employment that was so hateful to him. His release came in a different fashion. After a time John Dickens made a composition with his creditors and was released from prison. Later, he quarrelled with the relative who had suggested Charles's employment in the blacking factory, and in his anger removed his son from the employment. "With a

relief so strange that it was like oppression," says Charles Dickens, "I went home. . . . From that hour until this at which I write, no word of that part of my childhood which I have now gladly brought to a close, has passed my lips to any human being. I have no idea how long it lasted; whether for a year, or much more, or less. From that hour until this, my father and my mother have been stricken dumb upon it. I have never heard the least allusion to it, however far off and remote, from either of them. I have never, until I now impart it to this paper, in any burst of confidence with anyone, my own wife not excepted, raised the curtain I then dropped, thank God.

"Until old Hungerford Market was pulled down, until old Hungerford Stairs were destroyed, and the very nature of the ground changed, I never had the courage to go back to the place where my servitude began. I never saw it. I could not endure to go near it. For many years, when I came near to Robert Warren's, in the Strand, I crossed over to the opposite side of the way, to avoid a certain smell of the cement they put upon the blacking-corks, which reminded me of what I was once. It was a very long time before I liked to go up Chandos Street. My old way home by the Borough made me cry after my eldest child could speak.

"In my walks at night I have walked there often, since then, and by degrees I have come to write this. It does not seem a tithe of what I might have written, or of what I meant to write."

It was with a thrill of amazement and sympathy that the public first read the words that have been quoted in Forster's *Life of Dickens*, published in 1872. When, however, the story of David Copperfield was appearing month by month throughout the summer of 1849, no one except Forster himself had any idea that the author was relating his own experiences. But when the hero had escaped to the care of his aunt, the delightful Betsey Trotwood, had passed through Dr Strong's school, and had become an articled clerk to a proctor of Doctors Commons, there were slight resemblances between his career and that of Dickens, which were fairly obvious to his intimate friends. After attending for two

years a school in the neighbourhood of his home Dickens had become a lawyer's clerk. The ambition which even the apparent hopelessness of his earlier circumstances had not been able entirely to stifle now woke in full power. He endeavoured by regular and careful reading at the British Museum to make up, as far as possible, for his lack of early education. Like David Copperfield, he aspired to become a reporter, and to this end began to learn shorthand, the acquiring of perfect knowledge of which is, he estimates, "about equal in difficulty to the mastery of six languages."

Both Dickens and David Copperfield triumphed over the "savage stenographic mystery," however, and became Parliamentary reporters of high standing. The next venture of these two prototypes was a venture in authorship. "I wrote a little something in secret," says David, "and sent it to a magazine, and it was published in the magazine." Dickens tells us how one evening he dropped, "with fear and trembling, a paper addressed to the *Old Monthly Magazine* into a dark letter-box in a dark office up a dark court in Fleet Street"; and he tells of his joy when he saw his contribution in print. "I walked down to Westminster Hall, and turned into it for half an hour, because my eyes were so dimmed with joy and pride, that they could not bear the street, and were not fit to be seen there."

From this point the careers of David and of Dickens diverge widely. Both become famous authors, but in no other respect can a likeness be traced. It remains to say a few words about the originals of some of the characters of *David Copperfield*; and first of all, of Dora. Dora is drawn from Dickens's first love. Who she was he does not tell us, but upon the strength of his affection he is almost as eloquent as is David. "I don't quite apprehend," he wrote to Forster, who had ventured to doubt the reality of his youthful passion, "what you mean by my overrating the strength of the feeling of five-and-twenty years ago. If you mean of my own feeling and will only think what the desperate intensity of my nature is, and that this began when I was Charley's [his son's] age; that it excluded every other idea from my mind for four years, at a time of life when four years are

equal to four times four; and that I went at it with a determination to overcome all the difficulties, which fairly lifted me up into that newspaper life, and floated me away over a hundred men's heads; then you are wrong, because nothing can exaggerate that. . . . And just as I can never open that book as I open any other book, I cannot see the face (even at four-and-forty) or hear the voice without going wandering away over the ashes of all that youth and hope in the wildest manner." Dickens, it appears, kept up in his later years the acquaintance of his early love. A month after the letter just quoted was written he went to call upon her, and records that he saw with unmoved composure her favourite dog Jip, stuffed, in the hall. Soon after he began to write *Little Dorrit*, in which the portrait of Flora is drawn from the same original as that of Dora in his earlier work.

For Mr Micawber, as has already been stated, some hints were obtained from the character of the elder Dickens. Certain peculiarities of speech which had always been a source of amusement to his son were bestowed upon the great Mr Micawber, who, moreover, resembled his prototype in chronic impecuniosity and perennial hopefulness. But the portrait is in no sense an unkindly one, and was never resented by John Dickens. In the case of another character of *David Copperfield* its author was not equally fortunate. When the number appeared in which Miss Mowcher was first introduced to his readers he received a letter from a lady of his acquaintance, afflicted in a manner similar to the dwarf of his story, reproaching him with having thus held her up to ridicule. Dickens was full of contrition. He declared that he had had no idea the portrait would be recognized; that several of Miss Mowcher's characteristics—notably her habit of saying, "Ain't I volatile?"—had, in fact, been identified by his friends as belonging to quite another person; that he would do his best to remove the unpleasant impression he had created, and, to this end, would give to Miss Mowcher a *rôle* quite different from that which had originally been planned for her. It was in the fulfilment of this promise that the little dwarf was made instrumental in the capture of Littimer.

The Yarmouth group, which in the opinion of many readers contains the best characters in the book, had, as far as we know, no direct originals. Dickens was always most at home in drawing characters from humble life. His natural sympathy, combined with his early experiences, gave him a keen appreciation of the difficulties and temptations of the poor, and of the virtues which, as he has taught us, flourish so freely among them. He knew best, and could draw best, the poor of London ; but during the summers spent at Broadstairs and at other watering-places, both English and French, he always, in his own pleasant, hearty fashion, made friends with the fisherfolk and boatmen; and he certainly paid these friends of his a high compliment when he introduced to the reading world, as their representatives, Mr Peggotty and Ham.

The last number of *David Copperfield* appeared in November 1850, and with it Dickens reached the height of his fame. He wrote seven more novels during the twenty years of life that remained to him, but these, except perhaps *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations*, show, in comparison with the early works, some failure of inspiration. His life was an uneventful one, of almost unbroken prosperity. Its chief incidents were a second visit to America (1867) for the purpose of giving a series of public readings from his works in the chief towns of that country, and the continuation of these readings on his return to England. Their popularity, on both sides of the Atlantic, was astounding. They brought to Dickens immense sums of money, but the fatigue and excitement incident to them undoubtedly hastened his death.

On March 15, 1870, the farewell reading was given at St James's Hall. Dickens's health was much broken, but his friends hoped that complete rest would soon restore him to his normal state. He withdrew to the house at Gad's Hill, near Rochester, which he had bought twelve years before—the very house which, since he had been "a very queer small boy" of nine it had been his ambition to possess. Here, on June 9, he died, quite suddenly, after having been working all the morning at his novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood.*

He was deeply and sincerely mourned by all classes, both in England and America. Men were conscious of a personal loss, of a feeling that some genial, kindly influence had passed out of their lives. The story of the ragged market girl at Covent Garden who, when she was told that Dickens was dead, cried, "Will Christmas die too, then?" is typical of the way in which Dickens was regarded by a large section of the British people. He had done much by his writings to revive the keeping of Christmas as a great national home festival, and he stood in the minds of his fellow-countrymen for all those feelings that are associated with Christmas—goodwill, and mirth, and kindliness, and home affection, and the reaching out of hands toward poorer brethren.

In the early morning of the 14th of June, Charles Dickens was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey. The service, in accordance with his own strongly expressed wish, was strictly private, and for the same reason no monument or public memorial has been raised to his memory. "I rest my claim to the remembrance of my country," he had proudly said, "on my published works."

XXIII

JANE EYRE

ON a cold winter's day toward the end of February 1820 the Reverend Patrick Brontë, an Irish clergyman, arrived to take up his position as rector of the parish of Haworth, in Yorkshire. The village people long remembered how the seven heavily laden carts, which were bringing the new parson's goods from his previous home at Thornton, near Bradford, were dragged slowly up the steep village street toward the turning which led to Haworth Parsonage; and they remembered the small, neat, delicate-looking lady who was driven in from the neighbouring town of Keighley a few days afterward. This lady was the parson's wife, and she brought with her six tiny children, the eldest not much more than six years old. They were frail little mites, so quiet and 'old-fashioned' that, as the homely Yorkshire servants afterward said, you would scarcely know there was a child about the house. In intellect they were almost alarmingly precocious, and we may be quite sure that the two eldest, Maria and Elizabeth, and perhaps even the third, Charlotte, were conscious of the strangeness of their surroundings, and had their own thoughts and anticipations concerning the new life on which they were entering. What did they think, we wonder, of the heavily built grey stone house that stood so bleakly on the hill looking down upon the village; of the little church standing directly opposite; of the graveyard rising behind the church, thickly sown with solid, upright tombstones; of the moors which rose away and away behind the graveyard, as far as the eye could see, their dark wave-like lines broken only by white patches of snow? In after-life the children grew to love those moors, whose great, bare, lonely stretches had in them something congenial to their own shy, yet wild spirits.

From the first the moors were their playground—if such quiet, grave little creatures could ever be said to play. Their old nurse has told how they used to start out, the elder children carefully leading the toddling little ones—Branwell, the only boy of the family, Emily, and baby Anne. A strong affection bound them all together, and Maria, the eldest girl, was like a little mother to the others. Before she was eight years old she was, in truth, the only mother they had, for Mrs Brontë fell ill soon after she came to Haworth, and died in September 1821. For more than a year the little group of motherless children lived in the lonely parsonage, with such tendance as a rough but kindly Yorkshire servant could give. Their father was occupied with his work, and could spare them little of his time or attention. Toward the end of 1822 Miss Branwell, an elder sister of their mother's, came from her distant Cornish home to look after the household. She looked well to the children's bodily welfare, and brought up her nieces in habits of obedience and punctuality. She taught them to sew, to cook, and to manage household affairs; but their natures were so different from her own that she could do little for their intellectual and spiritual development. They still spent most of their time alone together, in a little room upstairs which was called "the children's study." They took a great interest in politics, and Maria read the newspapers of the day and explained their contents to her brother and sisters.

In July 1824 Maria and Elizabeth were sent to a school which had lately been opened at Cowan's Bridge, a tiny village between Leeds and Kendal. It was intended for the daughters of poor clergymen, and the very small fees were supplemented by funds subscribed by the supporters of the school. The domestic department seems to have been badly mismanaged. Charlotte Brontë who, with Emily, joined her sisters at Cowan's Bridge in December, has given a terrible picture of the school in *Jane Eyre*. The food was so badly cooked, and served in such slovenly fashion, that it was impossible for delicate children like the Brontës—who, moreover, were accustomed in their own home to the most scrupulous cleanliness—to eat it. The harsh rules pressed

heavily on gentle, timid natures, and illness was treated as a fault rather than as a misfortune. Under such a system Maria Brontë quickly sank. She was removed from the school in 1825 and died a few weeks afterward. Before the summer came the next sister, Elizabeth, too, was dead. Charlotte and Emily remained at Cowan's Bridge a few months longer, but the authorities, alarmed at their appearance of delicacy, and fearful lest they should follow their sisters, advised that they should not be left to pass another winter in a situation which evidently did not suit their constitutions. In the autumn of 1825 they returned to Haworth.

The diminished group of children—Charlotte, the eldest, was now nearly ten years old—took up their old life. Miss Branwell gave them all regular instruction for some hours each morning, and, for the rest, they educated themselves. They read and talked and discussed with their father the public events of the time. They wrote, too—tales, dramas, poems, romances—and Charlotte kept a kind of irregular diary which recorded the books she had read—a remarkable list—the pictures she had seen and those she would like to see, and the 'make believes' with which she and her sisters beguiled the long quiet days. They roamed about on the bleak and lonely moors and learned to love them with a passion which, though it found little outward expression, was nevertheless deep and strong. So they grew out of childhood into youth.

In 1831 Charlotte was again sent to school, this time to a private establishment, situated on the road between Leeds and Huddersfield. The head-mistress, Miss Wooler, was a woman of rare qualities and great skill in dealing with young girls, and the two years Charlotte spent there seem to have been as happy as any years could be spent away from the home and the family she loved so dearly. When she first entered Roe Head, as Miss Wooler's house was called, she was a girl of fifteen, very small in figure, though well formed, with soft thick brown hair, and reddish-brown eyes whose "usual expression was of quiet listening intelligence; but now and then, on some just occasion for vivid interest or wholesome indignation, a light would shine out, as if some

spiritual lamp had been kindled, which glowed behind those expressive orbs."

The queer old-fashioned little girl soon rose to the top of the school, and became a great favourite with her schoolfellows. They delighted in the stories which, when the mood was upon her, she would tell to them, and in the strange fancies which made her comments on their everyday surroundings so unique and fascinating. Her health improved with the free and active open-air life that Miss Wooler prescribed for her pupils, and when she returned to Haworth in 1832 she took with her a store of memories concerning the scenery and the life of the district round about Roe Head, which memories she afterward used in *Shirley*.

There followed two quiet years at home, and then Charlotte returned to Roe Head—this time as a teacher. She felt that it was her duty to do something by which she could earn money, now that the calls upon her father for the education of the younger ones, and especially of Branwell, were more than his slender income could well afford. Emily went with her sister, as a pupil, but she pined so for home and for the familiar moors that her health suffered, and after three months she went back to Haworth, and Anne took her place at Roe Head. To all three girls Haworth Parsonage was the one spot on earth which meant home, and about this time they began to scheme how they could manage to earn the money necessary for their support, without leaving the place they loved. Their thoughts naturally turned to authorship, for from their childish days they had been used to writing. During the Christmas holidays of 1836 they held many consultations concerning their future plans. "It was the household custom among these girls," says Mrs Gaskell, "to sew till nine o'clock at night. At that hour Miss Branwell generally went to bed, and her nieces' duties for the day were accounted done. They put away their work, and began to pace the room backward and forward, up and down—as often with the candles extinguished, for economy's sake, as not—their figures glancing into the firelight, and out into the shadow, perpetually. At this time, they talked over past cares and troubles; they planned for the future, and

consulted each other as to their plans." The outcome of the consultations of this winter was that Charlotte wrote to the poet Southey asking his advice as to taking up a literary career. She received, after a long interval, a reply, kind and sensible, but discouraging the idea. For another eighteen months she continued her work at Roe Head, and Emily took a situation at a school in Halifax; but a breakdown in health obliged each, in the summer of 1838, to return home. Funds, however, were scanty. Branwell had already begun that career of dissipation which was so cruelly to disappoint the high hopes his family had formed for him, and make him for years to come the shame of the simple, upright Haworth household. His extravagance dipped deeply into the family purse, and in 1839 both Anne and Charlotte obtained posts as private governesses. Another plan now began to occupy the minds of the three sisters. Could they not open a small school on their own account at Haworth and so, undivided and in their own home, earn a sufficient living? The idea was eagerly discussed, but with no definite result. Charlotte, whose strong good sense was one of her marked characteristics, soon realized that the education and accomplishments of herself and her sisters were not up to the standard required for really successful schoolmistresses. She resolved to make a determined attempt at self-improvement, and after much discussion, her aunt, Miss Branwell, agreed to advance a sum of money large enough to enable Charlotte and Emily to spend a year at a school in Brussels for the purpose of improving themselves in French, German, music, and drawing. In 1842 they left England, and established themselves at Brussels at a school of some reputation, kept by M. and Madame Héger. The story of Charlotte's Brussels experiences is told in *Villette*, written ten years later. It will be enough to say that though both girls suffered agonies from loneliness and shyness they profited greatly by their stay, and were treated, in all respects, with kindness and consideration. In November 1842 they were recalled to England by news of Miss Branwell's serious illness, and before they could start on their journey home came a second letter telling of her death. They reached Haworth just before Christmas, and

found that their aunt had left her small property to be divided among her three nieces. Thus provided with a little capital, they revived their plan of opening a school; but it was at length agreed that Charlotte should, first, in accordance with a proposal made by M. Héger, return to the Brussels school for a year as an English teacher. In January 1844 she was home again, and the school plan was seriously discussed. Pupils, however, were hard to find, though friends did their best.

As the year went on other circumstances caused the three girls silently, though with much bitterness of heart, to drop their long-cherished scheme. Branwell had returned home, and his habits of dissipation had now reached a stage which made it impossible that young girls should be received under the same roof with him. The years 1844 and 1845 were terrible and dreary years to the three sisters; but they never altogether lost hope or gave up the idea of employing the talents they felt that they possessed to some useful purpose. In the autumn of 1845 Charlotte induced the reserved and silent Emily to consent to add some of her poems to those written by her two sisters, for the purpose of publication. After some difficulty a publisher was found who was willing to produce the book at the authors' own expense. It appeared in May 1846 with the title of *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell.* These names had been chosen as giving no idea of sex, and as preserving the actual initials of the authors.

The book attracted little notice, though it contained the strange and beautiful poems of Emily Brontë which have since been judged by critics to belong to a very high order of poetry. The contributions of Charlotte and Anne were less remarkable. A second literary venture of the sisters had no better fortune. Each had written a prose work—Emily the strange story so full of wild untutored genius, *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte, *The Professor*, Anne, *Agnes Grey*. These stories they sent round from publisher to publisher, at first together, then separately; but still, with depressing regularity, the manuscripts were returned to Haworth Parsonage.

Meanwhile home worries and troubles, both small and great, harassed the three sisters. The old parsonage servant, Tabby, was now nearly eighty years old, and quite unequal to the work required of her ; but the Brontës would not send away one who had served them long and faithfully, and Tabby clung jealously to her position. Many household duties therefore fell to the lot of the two girls—more especially to Emily and Charlotte, for Anne, the "little one," was always more or less weak and ailing, and the other two cherished her with tender, motherly care. Their father was rapidly ageing ; his sight was failing, and it was feared that he would soon be quite blind. Worst of all, there was Branwell, the brother they had so loved and admired, who had given up all attempt now at earning his own living, and was gradually drinking himself to death before the eyes of his old father and his agonized sisters. It is little wonder that their writings at this time bore traces of their terrible experience.

In July 1846 it was decided that Mr Brontë must be operated upon for cataract, and in August Charlotte and he took lodgings in Manchester for this purpose. The operation was successfully performed, but Mr Brontë was obliged to remain in Manchester until the end of September, under the care of the oculist. It was at Manchester, in hired lodgings, oppressed by anxious care for her father, and away from the sisters whose sympathy meant so much to her, that Charlotte began to write a new story. The manuscript of *The Professor* had been again returned to her on the very morning of the day fixed for her father's operation ; but she bravely sent it off again, and resolutely set herself to her new work.

In September she came back to Haworth, and for nearly a year she wrote steadily, during all the leisure time she could command, at her story. A great part of her mornings were given to domestic work, and throughout the day would come calls for attention from her father and brother which could not be disregarded. Too frequently, also, came dreadful days and nights, when Branwell kept the whole house in terror by his violence and obstinacy, and when all their efforts scarcely

sufficed to keep the shameful skeleton in their cupboard hidden from the public gaze. But there were times of comparative quiet and security; and then Charlotte, when her work was done, would sit down in the quiet parsonage parlour, with a square of stiff cardboard, some small sheets of paper, and a pencil. With the board held up close to her short-sighted eyes, she would cover sheet after sheet of paper with her fine minute handwriting, pausing long sometimes to find the exact word to express her thought, but seldom altering what was once written down. As the room grew dark she would sit writing in the firelight; then, after giving her father his tea, she would write or sew with her sisters until nine o'clock. Then, in accordance with the old custom, all work was put away, the candles extinguished and the three small, frail figures paced backward and forward in the firelight, telling of their progress with poem or story, sketching suggested plots or incidents, and discussing many points connected with their work. It was during one of these evening talks that Charlotte announced her intention of departing from the accepted practice of novels and of making her heroine plain and insignificant instead of lovely and interesting. She told her sisters that they were wrong—even morally wrong—in making their heroines beautiful as a matter of course. They replied that it was impossible to make a heroine interesting on any other terms. Her answer was, "I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours." "But," she was careful to add, when she told of this incident at a later time, "she is not myself any further than that."

As the story went on her interest in it became intense. Every moment she could spare she spent in writing eagerly, almost feverishly, as the thoughts came rushing into her brain. But she never neglected the smallest of the household duties that fell to her share. Her father, though he guessed from her constant industry that some new project was going forward, was not taken into her confidence, lest if the effort resulted again in failure he should feel the disappointment too keenly. But her sisters watched the progress

of the story with a keenness of interest almost equal to her own.

At last there came some encouragement from the publishers. In the spring of 1847 *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* were accepted by a publisher on condition of the authors paying the expenses of their production. *The Professor* was still going on its weary round. In July it was sent to Messrs Smith, Elder and Co., and in August a reply was received, which, although it contained a rejection of the manuscript, was written "so courteously, so considerately, in a spirit so rational, with a discrimination so enlightened, that this very refusal cheered the author better than a vulgarly expressed acceptance would have done. It was added that a work in three volumes would meet with careful attention."

Jane Eyre was at this time nearly finished; in August it was sent to Messrs Smith, Elder and Co., and in October it was published. At this time *Vanity Fair* and *Dombey and Son* were still coming out in monthly numbers; Tennyson had just published *The Princess*, and the literary and artistic world was still occupied with Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. But in spite of all these preoccupations the public found time to read *Jane Eyre*. The leading reviews were cautious, and gave for the most part only meagre and guarded notices of this work by an unknown author; but at all the circulating libraries the demand for it increased every day. Readers discovered that here was a thrilling and exciting story in which the characters were so firmly drawn and the descriptive passages so powerful as to show it to be the work of a master hand.

Up in the lonely Yorkshire parsonage the author of the book scarcely dared to believe the reports which came to her from her publishers. She had become so accustomed to disappointment and failure that she had ceased to expect any other result from her efforts. But week by week the sales of *Jane Eyre* went up, and at last there could be no doubt that here, at last, was a great success. Curiosity with regard to the author grew until it reached fever-heat. Who could have written this wonderful book, which was capable of giving a

fresh sensation even to the most jaded novel-reader? The names of all the great writers of the day were passed in review, but without result, although for a time there was an inclination to attribute *Jane Eyre* to Thackeray. Most people believed "Currer Bell" to be a man; there was a general suspicion that the three "brothers Bell" were really one and the same person, and that *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* were earlier works by the author of *Jane Eyre*. The suggestion that the writer was a woman was, however, freely discussed. Miss Martineau, herself a celebrated authoress of the day, declared that there was a passage in the book concerning the sewing of some rings on curtains that could only have been written by a woman or an upholsterer. A writer in the *Quarterly*, December 1848, stated the conviction that if *Jane Eyre* were written by a woman it must be by one who had forfeited the right to the society of her sex. This was only one among many attacks made upon the morality of *Jane Eyre*—attacks which aroused in its author the utmost pain and indignation. Charlotte Brontë was strict in her ideas of propriety, she was deeply and sincerely religious, and she had the most exalted ideals concerning her work as a novelist. But although outwardly she was so quiet, even prim, in her demeanour, fierce passions burnt within. The staid little lady of thirty, with her plain face, shy manners, and dress so scrupulously simple and neat, might seem an unlikely subject for romance; yet her conception of love was so strong, so deep and so wild that she could give it in her writings no conventional dress. She spoke out clearly and plainly. Her heroine had none of the wiles and artifices, the mock-modesty and pretty coquetry which public opinion declared to be so becoming in a woman. It was this unconventionality in the portrayal of a woman's love that seemed to some sections of fashionable society so shocking. The book, though not free from melodrama and extravagance, has in it no suggestion of evil.

Gradually the secret of the authorship of the book was revealed. The old father was told first, and his pride and delight were extreme. Business complications made it necessary for Charlotte to reveal her identity to her publishers,

and in June 1848 she, with her sister Anne, paid a hurried visit to London. But home troubles soon drove from their minds all thought of literary triumphs. In September their brother Branwell died, and in December 1848 Emily, whose health had for some time been failing, followed him. She died, stoical and uncomplaining as she had lived, and her wonderful genius was quenched in its immaturity. At the beginning of 1849 Anne Brontë too began to decline rapidly, and in May 1849 her death left Charlotte alone in the parsonage, the sole stay of her aged father. It was during these dark months that her next book, *Shirley*, was begun; and she persevered with it even in the terrible depression caused by such a series of bereavements. "Sometimes when I wake in the morning," she wrote to a friend, "and know that Solitude, Remembrance and Longing are to be almost my sole companions all day through—that at night I shall go to bed with them, that they will long keep me sleepless—that next morning I shall wake to them again—sometimes, Nell, I have a heavy heart of it. But crushed I am not, yet; nor robbed of elasticity, nor of hope, nor quite of endeavour. I have some strength to fight the battle of life. I am aware, and can acknowledge, I have many comforts, many mercies. Still I can *get on*. But I do hope and pray that never may you, or anyone I love, be placed as I am. To sit in a lonely room—the clock ticking loud through a still house—and have open before the mind's eye the record of the last year, with its shocks, sufferings, losses—is a trial."

The remaining years of her life were passed in the courageous patient spirit indicated in this letter. *Shirley* appeared in October 1849, and was followed in 1853 by *Villette*, which is her masterpiece. Both these works were received with enthusiasm, and as Charlotte Brontë became generally known as their author she grew to be an object of interest to all England. In her brief visits to London she was fêted and lionized, but she was always glad to return to the old parsonage, where the care of her father, and the management of the little household, divided her time and attention with her books and her writing. In 1854 she married one of her

father's curates, who had long been attached to her; but her married happiness lasted but a few months. In March 1855 she died. From her own day to ours her fame has been growing, and her place as one of the greatest of the Victorian novelists is now assured.

XXIV

SCENES OF CLERICAL LIFE

FROM the bleak, bare moors of Yorkshire to the rich pastures of the Midlands—from Haworth Parsonage with its grey stone walls standing four square to all the winds of heaven to the "charming red-brick ivy-covered house" called Griff, with its delightful, old-fashioned garden and noble trees—this is the change that meets us when we turn from the life of Charlotte Brontë to that of "George Eliot." A few weeks after the Rev. Patrick Brontë had brought his wife and children to their new home at Haworth Robert Evans, estate agent, "whose extensive knowledge in very varied practical departments made his services valued through several counties," removed with his family to Griff. His eldest daughter, Christiana, was six years old; after her came Isaac, four years old, and then a little baby girl of four months, named Mary Ann. This was the future "George Eliot."

"George Eliot" was born only three years later than "Currer Bell," yet she did not begin her career as a novelist until two years after the life of her great sister writer had closed. She did not approach her work with that irresistible consciousness of a fixed vocation which impelled the Brontë sisters to scribble tales and poems almost as soon as they could write; she advanced toward it slowly and haltingly, with a painful diffidence and a distrust of her own powers which only gave way before strong encouragement from outside. Hers was one of those natures that ripen slowly, and late. Her life naturally divides itself into three parts—an idyllic childhood; a strenuous youth, marked by great emotional and intellectual activity; and a magnificent maturity, in which she found her real life-work, and produced the series of great novels that have made her name famous.

For the material of these she went back to the scenes and characters that had been familiar to her in her early years, and she brought to the handling of this material the skill that had been gained during a long period of intellectual training. She was no wild, untutored genius, but a woman who, while familiar with the most advanced philosophic and speculative ideas of her day, still kept a fresh and keen sympathy with primitive human emotions, a delight in things simple, homely, and natural, a tender reverence for all that belonged to her childish days. It is this rare conjunction of qualities that gives to her novels their unique character. Over and over again she insists on the power that early recollections have to transform and glorify the experiences of later life. "The wood I walk in on this mild May day, with the young yellow-brown foliage of the oaks between me and the blue sky, the white star-flowers and the blue-eyed speedwell and the ground ivy at my feet—what grove of tropic palms, what strange ferns, or splendid broad-petalled blossoms, could ever thrill such deep and delicate fibres within me as this home scene? . . . Our delight in the sunshine on the deep-bladed grass to-day, might be no more than the faint perception of wearied souls, if it were not for the sunshine and the grass in the far-off years which still live in us, and transform our perception into love."

For twenty-one years Mary Ann Evans lived at the beautiful old house where she had been born. The chief figures in her life during this period are her father, her brother, and, later, Miss Lewis, a governess at the school to which she was sent. All her life long she felt strongly the need of some one person to whom she could cling, whom she could love with a passionate, exclusive affection, and who would love her after the same fashion. She found her first hero in her brother Isaac. *The Mill on the Floss* and the *Brother and Sister Sonnets* both tell of this early devotion.

> I cannot choose but think upon the time
> When our two lives grew like two buds that kiss
> At lightest thrill from the bee's swinging chime,
> Because the one so near the other is.

He was the elder and a little man
Of forty inches, bound to show no dread,
And I the girl that puppy-like now ran,
Now lagged behind my brother's larger tread.
I held him wise, and when he talked to me
Of snakes and birds, and which God loved the best,
I thought his knowledge marked the boundary
Where men grew blind, though angels knew the rest.
If he said, "Hush!" I tried to hold my breath.
Wherever he said, "Come!" I stepped in faith.

The two children fished in the "brown canal" that made its slow way round a "grassy hill" and on across the spreading meadows; they picked the blue forget-me-nots, and looked with awe on the "black-scathed grass" that "betrayed the past abode of mystic gypsies," and the little girl joined her brother in boyish games of marbles and top-spinning. But when Isaac Evans was eight years old he was sent away to a boarding school, and Mary Ann went to join her elder sister at a school at Attleboro.

School parted us; we never found again
That childish world where our two spirits mingled
Like scents from varying roses that remain
One sweetness, nor can ever more be singled.
Yet the twin habit of that early time
Lingered for long about the heart and tongue:
We had been natives of one happy clime,
And its dear accent to our utterance clung.
Till the dire years whose awful name is Change
Had grasped our souls still yearning in divorce.
And pitiless shaped them in two forms that range
Two elements which sever their life's course.
But were another childhood-world my share,
I would be born a little sister there.

For about four years the sisters remained at Attleboro, and then proceeded to a larger school at Nuneaton. Here Mary Ann Evans formed her memorable friendship with Miss Lewis, whose fervent piety and evangelical opinions had a strong influence on her ardent and impressionable pupil. From Nuneaton she went to Coventry to a school kept by two sisters, the Misses Franklin, where her religious tendencies were deepened and strengthened. At all three

schools she had shown remarkable aptitude in her studies, especially in music, literature, and English composition, and was looked upon as a girl of great and unusual talents.

She came back to the old home at Griff in 1835, a girl of sixteen probably very much like her own heroine, Maggie Tulliver—"A creature full of eager passionate longings for all that was beautiful and glad; thirsty for all knowledge; with an ear straining after dreamy music that died away and would not come near to her; with a blind unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life, and give her soul a sense of home in it." But strongest of all her impulses was that toward religion. Her letters to Miss Lewis at this time show how completely her religion dominated her life. She even inclined to regard the music she loved so much as sinful because it distracted her thoughts from higher things, and she condemned novel-reading as not only useless, but pernicious.

In 1836 Mrs Evans died, after a long and painful illness during which she was nursed with the greatest devotion by both her daughters. The next year Christiana Evans married, and the younger sister was left in the old house alone with her father. She became an excellent house-wife, and prided herself upon her household arrangements, her cooking and preserves. At the same time she tried to carry on the studies that had been begun at school. "My mind," she wrote to Miss Lewis in 1839, "presents an assemblage of disjointed specimens of history, ancient and modern; scraps of poetry picked up from Shakespeare, Cowper, Wordsworth and Milton; newspaper topics; morsels of Addison and Bacon, Latin verbs, geometry, entomology, and chemistry; Reviews and metaphysics—all arrested and petrified and smothered by the fast-thickening everyday accession of actual events, relative anxieties and household cares and vexations." She wrote poems for religious magazines, and she planned a complicated chart of ecclesiastical history. In 1840 she began to take lessons in German. Even at this time she had visions of accomplishing something really great in literature, but her natural diffidence too often threw her back into hopelessness.

In the last year of her life, when she was urged to write her autobiography, she replied, with reference to these early years, "The only thing I should care to dwell on would be the absolute despair I suffered from of ever being able to achieve anything. No one could ever have felt greater despair, and a knowledge of this might be a help to some other struggler."

Toward the end of 1840 Mr Robert Evans gave up his business and his house to his son Isaac, and retired with his daughter to a pleasant semi-detached house in Coventry. This change opened an entirely new society to Mary Ann Evans. In Coventry she found friends who could sympathize with her intellectual pursuits and ambitions. Chief among these were Mr Bray, a ribbon manufacturer, his wife, and his wife's brother and sister, Charles and Sara Hennell. Under these influences her intellectual development went on rapidly. Her religious opinions underwent a change, and the fervent Evangelical churchwoman gradually took up the attitude of reverent agnosticism which she maintained throughout her life. In 1843 she undertook her first serious piece of literary work, a translation of Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, which occupied her for two years. From 1846 to 1849 most of her time was taken up in attendance on her father during his last illness. In May 1849 he died, and the daughter, who for more than twelve years had been his sole household companion, was left alone. "What shall I be without my father?" she had written to her friends, the Brays, on the morning of the day on which he died. "It will seem as if a part of my moral nature were gone." She was worn out, both physically and mentally, and complete rest was essential. In the summer of 1849 she started with the Brays on a Continental tour, and when they returned home she stayed on at Geneva for another eight months. The visit was in every way beneficial to her. She found kind and congenial friends, and returned to England in March 1850 refreshed and invigorated.

Robert Evans had left his daughter enough money to supply her with the necessities of life, but her ardent and ambitious nature made it impossible for her to spend her

time idly or uselessly. She determined to take up literary work as a serious profession, and in September 1851 she became sub-editor of the *Westminster Review*, and went to live in London. Her position now brought her into association with the leading writers of the day. Froude, Carlyle, Grote, John Stuart Mill, Harriet Martineau, and Herbert Spencer were among those who were on its staff of contributors or were familiar figures at its office. Miss Evans herself contributed critical articles more or less regularly, and did a vast amount of miscellaneous literary work.

Toward the end of 1851 she was introduced by Mr Herbert Spencer to George Henry Lewes, whose influence henceforward was to be the greatest factor in her life. He was a clever and brilliant writer on literary and philosophical subjects, and had written two novels, one of which, *Rose, Blanche, and Violet*, had brought him considerable reputation. His conversation was as brilliant as his writing, and his personality was extremely attractive. A friendship sprang up between him and Miss Evans, which ripened into a warm attachment. It was impossible for them to marry for Lewes had already a wife from whom he was separated under circumstances that made divorce impossible; but they lived for the rest of their lives on terms of the closest intimacy. Miss Evans found in Lewes the stay and support which she needed. He shielded her from anxieties in every possible way, guarded her interests, cheered and encouraged her in her fits of low spirits, and gave her the warm, sincere praise which was so helpful to her in battling with her excessive natural diffidence. But the greatest service he rendered her was that of encouraging her to her first essay in fiction. "It had always," Miss Evans tells us, in the account she gives of this memorable venture, "been a vague dream of mine that some time or other I might write a novel; and my shadowy conception of what the novel was to be, varied, of course, from one epoch of my life to another. But I never went further toward the actual writing of the novel than an introductory chapter describing a Staffordshire village, and the life of the neighbouring farmhouses; and as the years passed on I lost any hope that I should ever be able to write a novel,

just as I desponded about everything else in my future life. I always thought I was deficient in dramatic power, both of construction and dialogue, but I felt I should be at my ease in the descriptive parts of a novel. My 'introductory chapter' was pure description, though there were good materials in it for dramatic presentation." This chapter she one day read over to Mr Lewes. He saw its merit, and urged her to continue the work, though he doubted, as she did herself, whether her dramatic power was equal to novel-writing. After long hesitation Miss Evans set about her story, encouraged at each step by Lewes. "You have wit, description, and philosophy," he used to say, "those go a good way toward the production of a novel. It is worth while to try the experiment."

In 1853 Miss Evans resigned her position on the *Westminster*, so that she was free to carry on her independent work. She began her story on September 22, 1856, and finished it on November 5. It was called *The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton.* Mr Lewes sent it to *Blackwood's Magazine*, saying that it was the work of a friend who had never before attempted fiction, that it was to be the first of a series of sketches illustrative of the life of our country clergy about a quarter of a century ago; and if Mr Blackwood considered it suitable for publication in his magazine the rest of the series, which would be entitled *Scenes of Clerical Life*, would shortly be forthcoming. The story was accepted and the first part published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, January 1857. "Whatever may be the success of my stories," their author had written to Mr Blackwood, "I shall be resolute in preserving my *incognito*—having observed that a *nom de plume* secures all the advantages without the disagreeables of reputation. Perhaps, therefore, it will be well to give you my prospective name, as a tub to throw to the whale in case of curious inquiries; and accordingly I subscribe myself, best and most sympathising of Editors, yours very truly, George Eliot.

This *nom de plume* has effectually displaced her real name; we seldom speak of Mary Ann Evans, but often of George Eliot. George, she tells us, was chosen because it was Mr

Lewes's Christian name, and Eliot because it was "a good mouth-filling, easily pronounced name." The tales were at once successful; and as in the case of "Currer Bell" curiosity with regard to the unknown author was very strongly excited. Mr Carlyle, Froude, and Thackeray thought very highly of the stories; Dickens was enthusiastic in their praise. He had never, he said, seen anything to equal "the exquisite truth and delicacy both of the humour and pathos of these stories." His appreciation gave him insight. While some readers were surmising that the *Scenes* must have been written by a clergyman, others attributing them to Bulwer Lytton, and a few giving credence to the claim made by a Mr Liggins, of Warwickshire, Dickens declared that the author must be a woman; or, if not, "no man ever before had the art of making himself so like a woman since the world began."

The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton which began the series is the story of a country clergyman with a small income, a large family, and an almost perfect wife. The Rev. Amos himself is in no way remarkable; he is one of those "commonplace people" of whom George Eliot always speaks with such wise tenderness. "These commonplace people," she says, "—many of them—bear a conscience, and have felt the sublime prompting to do the painful right; they have their unspoken sorrows, and their sacred joys; their hearts have perhaps gone out toward their first-born, and they have mourned over the irreclaimable dead. Nay, is there not a pathos in their very insignificance—in our comparison of their dim and narrow existence with the glorious possibilities of that human nature which they share? Depend upon it, you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and the comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones."

In these words, written in her first story, George Eliot tells us what is to be the aim and scope of all her novels, if we except *Romola* and perhaps *Daniel Deronda*. All the others deal with quite ordinary people, to whom come the ordinary

joys, sorrows, and temptations of human life; and it is the author's greatest triumph that she can give to these commonplace histories not only interest, but charm.

Mr Gilfil's Love Story followed *Amos Barton*, and the third and last story of the series, *Janet's Repentance*, appeared before the end of the year. The plan of this story gives an opportunity for a sketch of Milby society which in freshness, spirit, and humour is only equalled by that even more noted description of the society of St Oggs, which came three years later in *The Mill on the Floss*. The characters are only inferior to the Tullivers and Pullets, the Glegs, the Deanes, and the Guests of the later novel as slight sketches are inferior to detailed portraits. All the gifts which made George Eliot famous are to be found exemplified in these early stories. The moral earnestness, the ennobling conception of life and its duties, the delightful humour and tender sympathy are all there; and if we have no Maggie Tulliver, no Romola, and no Mrs Poyser, the reason lies in lack of space for their full development, not in lack of manifested power.

The scenes of the stories are the scenes familiar to George Eliot's childhood. Shepperton Church, which she "began to look at with delight, even when I was so crude a member of the congregation that my nurse found it necessary to provide for the reinforcement of my devotional patience by smuggling bread and butter into the sacred edifice" is the church of Chilvers-Coton, near Nuneaton. Cheveril Manor is Arbury Park, where lived the Newdigate family, to whom Robert Evans acted as agent; Milby is Coventry. Some of the characters are drawn with such fidelity from living originals that they were at once recognized by friends and neighbours, to George Eliot's great regret and embarrassment. She never repeated this mistake; with further artistic development came the power of so transforming the material with which her experience supplied her as to produce from it a new creation rather than a copy.

The *Scenes of Clerical Life* were completed on October 9, 1857, and on October 22 *Adam Bede* was begun. The publication of this work (1859) secured George Eliot's

position in the first rank of Victorian novelists. In 1860 came *The Mill on the Floss*, followed by *Silas Marner*, 1861; *Romola*, 1863; *Felix Holt*, 1866; *Middlemarch*, 1872; *Daniel Deronda*, 1876. On December 22, 1880, George Eliot died, at the age of sixty-one.

XXV

THE IDYLLS OF THE KING

ALFRED TENNYSON was born and spent his childhood at his father's rectory of Somersby, in North Lincolnshire. He was the fourth in a family of eight sons and four daughters. His love for poetry was shown while he was quite a little lad, and he very early began to make verses. When he was seven years old he was sent to school at Louth. His memories of his schooldays were mainly unhappy ones, and the best part of his early education he gained from his own reading in his father's fine library. In 1827 he and his brother Charles published a book of poems which they called *Poems by Two Brothers*. For this a local bookseller gave them twenty pounds, and with part of this money they hired a carriage, drove fourteen miles to Mablethorpe, and there "shared their triumph with the winds and waves."

In February 1828 Alfred Tennyson entered Trinity College, Cambridge. Here he quickly made for himself a position and friends. "Alfred Tennyson was our hero, the great hero of our day," wrote one of these; and another described him as, "Six feet high, broad-chested, strong-limbed, his face Shakespearean, with deep eyelids, his forehead ample, crowned with dark wavy hair, his head finely poised, his hand the admiration of sculptors." At Cambridge he made one of a little group of students known among their friends as the "Apostles," almost all of whom became famous in after years. They met in each other's rooms for the reading of essays and for discussion, and they formed friendships which lasted throughout their lives.

In 1830 Tennyson published another volume called *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, and in 1832 a third which contained some of the poems by which he is remembered to-day—e.g. *Œnone*,

The Palace of Art, A Dream of Fair Women. He left College in 1831, and returned to Somersby. In October 1833 Arthur Hallam, who had been his closest friend at Cambridge, and his loyal comrade and adviser ever since, died suddenly at Vienna. The blow fell crushingly on Tennyson, and for years this loss darkened his life. In the sad winter days that followed he began to write the fragments of mournful verse that gradually developed into that noble tribute to his dead friend—the poem of *In Memoriam.*

> Where is the voice I loved? Ah, where
> Is that dear hand that I would press?
> Lo! the broad heavens cold and bare,
> The stars that know not my distress.
> . . . . . .
> The vapour labours up the sky,
> Uncertain forms are darkly moved!
> Larger than human passes by
> The shadow of the man I loved,
> And clasps his hands, as one that prays!

For ten years after the death of Arthur Hallam Tennyson published nothing. The first four years he spent quietly at Somersby Rectory, which still remained the home of the Tennysons, though the father had died in 1831. From time to time he made an expedition to London, to see his old friends, and in 1835 he visited the Lake Country. But such jaunts were rare; for he was poor, and his poetical work had so far brought in nothing save the memorable twenty pounds. Moreover he was working hard at his poems, polishing and almost rewriting some of those already published, and composing new ones. "From the letters of that time," his son wrote, in the *Memoir* published in 1897, "I gather that there was a strong current of depreciation of my father in certain literary quarters. However, he kept up his courage, profited by friendly and unfriendly criticism, and in silence, obscurity and solitude, perfected his art."

Edward Fitzgerald tells us that in 1835 when he, James Spedding (another famous member of the Cambridge group), and Tennyson were in the Lake District together Tennyson used, in the evenings, to take out a "little red book" of

manuscript and read to his two friends the poems he had lately written. These included the *Morte d'Arthur*, *The Day Dream*, *The Lord of Burleigh*, *Dora*, and *The Gardener's Daughter*. Of the *Morte d'Arthur* he had previously written to Spedding that he thought it was the "best thing I have managed lately," and it is interesting to us as being the first instalment of the *Idylls of the King*. No idea of the larger work seems to have yet occurred to Tennyson, although *Sir Galahad*, written about the same time, shows that the story of King Arthur and his knights was already beginning to occupy his thoughts.

In 1837 the Tennysons left Somersby and took a house at High Beech, in Epping Forest. There, in his study, which "was not the top attic, according to his usual preference, but a large room over the dining-room, with a bay-window, red curtains, and a Clytie on a pedestal in the corner," Tennyson worked. Slowly the number of poems ready for publication increased. In 1840 the family left High Beech, and after a short stay at Tunbridge Wells settled at Boxley, near Maidstone. Tennyson spent a great part of the year 1842 in London, and mixed freely with the "Apostles," many of whom had become noted men, and with others of the foremost in literature. Tennyson, when the mood was on him, was a most delightful companion. He was shy in general society, and he had much of the "black blood" which he tells us was the inheritance of his race. This at times cast him into such terrible fits of depression as seriously affected his health. It prevented him from looking out on life with a calm and settled hopefulness, and though he possessed the larger faith which could see, clear-eyed, beyond the enveloping cloud, and recognize the "increasing purpose" that ran through the ages, yet he was often tormented by the apparent cruelty of the methods by which the progress of the race must be brought about. In his normal moods, however, he was cheerful enough, and capable of the wildest flights of mirth and nonsense. In 1842 some of the high spirits which, since the death of Arthur Hallam, he had lost, were coming back. "He used to do the sun coming out from a cloud, and retiring into one again, with a gradual opening and shutting of the

eyes, and with a great fluffing up of his hair into full wig and elevation of cravat and collar ; George IV in as comical and wonderful a way." Or he would give dramatic recitals from Shakespeare or Molière, or enact with grim humour Milton's " So started up in his foul shape the fiend," from the crouching of the toad to the explosion, " varying these performances with imitations of public men of the day." He became intimate with Carlyle, whose acquaintance he had made two years before, and the philosopher wrote, in a letter to his brother, a description of his new acquaintance. " A fine, large-featured, dim-eyed, bronze-coloured, shaggy-headed man is Alfred ; dusty, smoky, free and easy ; who swims, outwardly and inwardly, with great composure in an articulate element as of tranquil chaos and tobacco smoke ; great now and then when he does emerge ; a most restful, brotherly, solid-hearted man." Mrs Carlyle describes him as " a very handsome man, and a noble-hearted one, with something of the gypsy in his appearance, which for me is perfectly charming."

During this stay in London the poems for the new volume were undergoing final revision. Fitzgerald tells of the meetings which took place in Spedding's chambers at 60 Lincoln's Inn Fields. " The poems to be printed were nearly all, I think all, written out in a foolscap folio parchment bound blank book such as accounts are kept in (only not ruled), and which I used to call ' The Butcher's Book.' The poems were written in A. T.'s very fine hand (he once said, not thinking of himself, that great men generally wrote ' terse ' hands) toward one side of the large page ; the unoccupied edges and corners being stript down for pipe-lights, taking care to save the MS., as A. T. once seriously observed. These pages of MS. from the Butcher's Book were one by one torn out for the printer, and when returned with the proofs were put in the fire. I reserved two or three of the leaves ; and gave them to the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge."

The period of publication was a time of trial to the critical and sensitive poet, with his lofty ideal of what his work should be. " Poor Tennyson has got home some of his proof-sheets," writes Fitzgerald, " and now that his verses are in

hard print he thinks them detestable." "But," he goes on, ". . . he will publish such a volume as has never been published since the time of Keats, and which, once published, will never be suffered to die. This is my prophesy, for I live before Posterity."

The prophecy was fulfilled. The two volumes of 1842 contained, besides the poems that have already been mentioned, others which are still held as among the greatest that our great Victorian Laureate ever wrote. Such are *The Talking Oak, Locksley Hall, The Two Voices, The Poet's Song, Ulysses,* and *Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere.* Some of the poet's friends and critics—notably Edward Fitzgerald—held that he never again rose quite as high as he had done in these volumes. The reviews in the leading magazines were favourable, and the general public came gradually to appreciate the fine quality of the work put before them. Among the group of cultured literary men who were Tennyson's intimates or acquaintances there was only one opinion. "Truly," wrote Carlyle, "it is long since in any English book, Poetry or Prose, I have felt the pulse of a real man's heart as I do in this same." Dickens wrote to him as "a man whose writings enlist my whole heart and nature in admiration of their Truth and Beauty"; and the old poet and patron of poets, Samuel Rogers, declared that "few things, if any, have ever thrilled me so much as 'your two beautiful volumes.'"

Tennyson's reputation was secure, although his general popularity increased only very gradually. At first the poems brought a very small money return. There still seemed little prospect that he would ever obtain an adequate income from his works, and to do so was his ardent desire. Since 1836 he had been engaged to marry Miss Emily Sellwood, sister to his brother Charles's wife, and the marriage was only delayed through his lack of means. In 1843, by the failure of Dr Allen's wood-carving company, he lost almost all his small capital. The disappointment threw him into one of his constitutional fits of despondency. He became really ill, and was induced by his family to try the hydropathic treatment at Cheltenham. While he was there came a letter

from Sir Robert Peel, telling him that a pension of two hundred pounds had been conferred on him by the Crown. It was accepted, though with some hesitation. "Something in that word 'pension,'" wrote Tennyson to a friend, "sticks in my gizzard; it is only the name, and perhaps would smell 'sweeter' by some other. Well, I suppose I ought in a manner to be grateful."

In 1847 Tennyson published *The Princess*, and in 1850 *In Memoriam*. Both were well received, and their success brought the longed-for competence. In June 1850 Tennyson was married to Miss Sellwood at Shiplake Church, on the Thames. They lived for a short time in Sussex, and then for nearly three years at Twickenham. In November 1850, upon the death of Wordsworth, Tennyson was appointed Poet Laureate. In 1852 his son Hallam was born, and in 1854 a second son, Lionel. In 1853 Tennyson's circumstances had so far improved that he resolved on moving to a larger house in the country. He settled at last on a house at Farringford in the Isle of Wight. It was within sight and sound of the sea, and to the left rose the breezy, beautiful Downs. It was secluded enough to satisfy Tennyson's love of retirement, yet not too far from books and publishers. Here for forty years was his home, and here he wrote many of his most famous works.

The life at Farringford, as it is described in the *Memoir* of Tennyson, written by his eldest son, was ideally beautiful, and cannot be told so well as in the words of one who took part in it. "My father and mother settled to a country life at once, looking after their little farm, and tending the poor and sick of the village. In the afternoons they swept up leaves, mowed the grass, gravelled the walks, and he built what he called a 'bower of rushes' in the kitchen garden. The primroses and snowdrops and other flowers were a constant delight, and he began a flower dictionary. He also bought spy-glasses through which he might watch the ways and movements of the birds in the ilexes, cedar- and fir-trees. Geology too he took up, and trudged out with the local geologist, Keeping, on many a long expedition. . . .

"If it was rainy or stormy, and we were kept indoors, he

often built cities for us with bricks, or played battledore and shuttlecock ; or sometimes he read Grimm's *Fairy Stories* or repeated ballads to us. . . . On feast days he would blow bubbles and then grow much excited over the 'gorgeous colours and landscapes, and the planets breaking off from their suns, and the single star becoming a double star,' which he saw in these bubbles ; or if it were evening he would help us to act scenes from some well-known play. . . . My father was always interested in the imaginative views which we children took of our surroundings. Of these I may give one instance ; how Lionel had been brought from his bed at night, wrapt in a blanket, to see the great comet, and suddenly awaking and looking out at the starry night, asked, 'Am I dead?'"

The house at Farringford was beautiful and homelike. It seemed, Lady Ritchie (daughter of Thackeray) tells us, "like a charmed palace, with green walls without, and speaking walls within. There hung Dante with his solemn nose and wreath ; Italy gleamed over the doorways ; friends' faces lined the passages, books filled the shelves, and a glow of crimson was everywhere ; the oriel drawing-room window was full of green and golden leaves, of the sound of birds and of the distant sea."

The first poem written in the new home was *Maud*, Tennyson's own favourite among all his works. He wrote it, his son says, "morning and evening, sitting in his hard, high-backed wooden chair in his little room at the top of the house. His 'sacred pipes,' as he called them, were half an hour after breakfast, and half an hour after dinner, when no one was allowed to be with him, for then his best thoughts came to him. As he made the different poems he would repeat or read them. The constant reading of the new poems aloud was the surest way of helping him to find out any defects they might possess. During his 'sacred half-hours' and his other working hours and even on the Downs, he would murmur his new passages or new lines as they came to him, a habit that had always been his since boyhood, and which had caused the Somersby cook to say, 'What is master Awlfred always a praying for?'"

The Tennysons were so well pleased with Farringford that in 1853 Tennyson decided to buy it, and the "ivied home among the pine-trees" became his own. Early in the same year he began to work seriously at his *Idylls of the King*, the general plan of which had been for some time in his mind. He took up the story of King Arthur in the same spirit that Spenser had brought to it three hundred years before. "The generall end, therefore, of all the book is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline," the Elizabethan poet had said; and his Victorian descendant spoke after the same fashion. King Arthur "is meant to be a man who spent himself in the cause of honour, duty and self-sacrifice, who felt and aspired with his nobler knights, though with a stronger and a clearer conscience than any of them, 'reverencing his conscience as his king.' 'There was no such perfect man since Adam,' as an old writer says." Tennyson's ideal knight of the nineteenth century naturally differs from Spenser's ideal knight of the sixteenth. The later poet has been severely blamed because he attributed to this old British king the ethical code and the manners of modern times. He produced thereby, say the critics, a fantastic and unreal work which has nothing of the spirit of the old medieval stories, such as is to be found in Malory's great prose version of the Arthurian legend, and which loses interest as a modern poem through its scene being laid in the far past. The criticism is to some extent a just one; yet the *Idylls* have a beauty and a value which such criticism cannot touch. The general idea on which they are based is a lofty and a noble one. "We needs must love the highest when we see it," and Tennyson here puts the "highest" before us in such a lovely and attractive form that it would be difficult indeed not to "see" it. The workmanship of the poems is perfect—too perfect, some critics are inclined to think. "I am not sure," wrote Ruskin to Tennyson, "but I feel the art and finish in these poems a little more than I like to feel it. Yet I am not a fair judge quite, for I am so much of a realist as not by any possibility to interest myself much in an unreal subject, to feel it as I should, and the very sweetness and stateliness of the words strike me all the more as *pure*

workmanship." But this objection cannot hold with reference to the great and inspired passages of which examples are to be found in almost every one of the *Idylls*; and instead of searching for faults in things so beautiful we should do better to accept them in the spirit of Thackeray, as something for which we may rejoice and be thankful. "Here I have been," wrote the great novelist, "lying back in the chair and thinking of those delightful *Idylls*, my thoughts being turned to you; and what could I do but be grateful to that surprising genius which has made me so happy. Gold and purple and diamonds, I say, gentlemen, and glory and love and honour, and if you haven't given me all these, why should I be in such an ardour of gratitude? But I have had out of that dear book the greatest delight that has ever come to me since I was a young man."

Merlin and Vivien was finished by March 31, 1856, and *Geraint and Enid* begun on April 16. It was finished during an expedition to Wales toward the end of the summer. "The Usk murmurs by the windows," Tennyson wrote, "and I sit like King Arthur in Caerleon." On July 9, 1857, Mrs Tennyson entered in her diary, "Alfred has brought me as a birthday present the first two lines he has made of *Guinevere* which might be the nucleus of a great poem." On March 8 following she wrote, "To-day he has written his song of *Too Late* and has said it to me"; and on March 15, "*Guinevere* is finally completed."

Toward the end of the summer of 1859 the first four Idylls were published. The book had an immediate success, ten thousand copies being sold in the first week of publication. Tennyson had at last become a popular poet.

No more of the *Idylls* were published for ten years. Tennyson hesitated about continuing them, "I have thought about it," he wrote in 1862, "but I dare not set to work for fear of failure and time lost." He was meditating whether he should or should not take up the story of the Holy Grail. "I doubt whether such a subject could be handled in these days without incurring a charge of irreverence." *The Holy Grail* was at last written "as if by a breath of inspiration"; and in 1869 was published the volume containing that poem and

The Coming of Arthur, Pelleas and Etarre, and *The Passing of Arthur. The Last Tournament* and *Gareth and Lynette* appeared in 1872; then, after an interval of thirteen years, came the last of the series, *Balin and Balan.*

The *Idylls* were dedicated to the Prince Consort in verses so beautiful, so tender, and so full of a just and wise appreciation of the great man who had gone that it was no wonder the Princess Royal wrote to Tennyson: "Surely it must give the Author satisfaction to think that his words have been drops of balm on the broken and loving hearts of the widowed Queen and her orphaned children." At the end of the *Idylls* comes an address *To the Queen,* which contains lines in which Tennyson tells something of his purpose and meaning in writing the poems.

> But thou, my Queen,
> Not for itself, but thro' thy living love
> For one to whom I made it o'er his grave
> Sacred, accept this old imperfect tale,
> New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul
> Rather than that gray king, whose name, a ghost,
> Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak,
> And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still.

He ends with words of noble comfort in the troublous times that then seemed approaching.

> Yet—if our slowly-grown
> And crown'd Republic's crowning common-sense,
> That saved her many times, not fail—their fears
> Are morning shadows huger than the shapes
> That cast them, not those gloomier which forego
> The darkness of that battle in the West,
> Where all of high and holy dies away.

During the next twelve years Tennyson occupied himself chiefly with a series of historical dramas in blank verse—*Harold, Becket, Queen Mary,* and some minor dramatic pieces—*The Falcon, The Cup,* and *The Promise of May.* In 1874 he was raised to the peerage as Baron of Aldworth and Farringford, his seats in Sussex and in the Isle of Wight. In 1880 he published a volume of ballads containing among other pieces the famous *Revenge.* He continued to write up

to the last year of his life, and in 1889, when he was eighty years old, produced *Crossing the Bar*, which has all the beauty and grace of the lyrics written when his powers were at their fullest. He died at Aldworth on October 6, 1892, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.